

The Other Mother: Motherhood Tropes in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

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Abstract

The Other Mother: Motherhood Tropes in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

Toward the Millennium and since the turn of the 21st century, Norwegian literature has increasingly focused on the theme of the family. Simultaneous to this literary trend, a new trend in contemporary Norwegian literature emerged, what has been termed migrant literature or multicultural literature (however what I will term diaspora narratives or diaspora literature), which expands and redefines what it means to be Norwegian to include those of diverse backgrounds. Several Norwegian authors of immigrant background have situated their work in the space where these two trends intersect. These authors all write, in the Norwegian language, about their upbringing as Norwegian, however, marked with an outsider status. Integral to their *Bildung* is their relationship with their mothers, a similar maternal figure, or the Norwegian discourse of motherhood.

This dissertation explores how motherhood and motherhood tropes are depicted in some Norwegian diaspora literature and how “the Other mother” is depicted in contemporary Norwegian works written by authors of immigrant background. It begins with a contextualization of Norway’s diaspora literature and the public debate surrounding *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel]. Following the first situating chapter is a multi-chapter argument about three different motherhood tropes present in diaspora literature; I refer to these motherhood tropes as: 1) the trope of the cultured mother, 2) the trope of the creative mother, and 3) the appropriation of Henrik Ibsen’s female protagonist Nora Helmer (*Et dukkehjem* [1897, A Doll’s House]). Illustrating these tropes shows the

presence of a curious, and developing, critique of motherhood found in some of Norway's diaspora literature. The concluding chapter explores one novel, *Desiland* (2010) by Mala Naveen, which incorporates and challenges these three motherhood tropes by breaking with convention. I argue that these works perform an alternate Norwegian identity – one that calls for a radical renegotiation or remapping of the current paradigm of Norwegianness.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to
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Introduction

The Other Mother: Motherhood Tropes in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

Toward the Millennium and since the turn of the 21st century, Norwegian literature has increasingly focused on the theme of the family (Gjellstad 2004). Simultaneous to this literary trend, a new trend in contemporary Norwegian literature emerged, what has been termed migrant literature or multicultural literature (however what I will term diaspora narratives or diaspora literature, a decision I discuss in Chapter 1), which expands and redefines what it means to be Norwegian to include those of diverse backgrounds (Kongslien 2007, 2013). Several Norwegian authors of immigrant background have situated their work in the space where these two trends intersect.¹ These authors all write, in the Norwegian language, about their upbringing as Norwegian, however, marked with an outsider status. Integral to their *Bildung* is their relationship with their mothers, a similar maternal figure, or the Norwegian discourse of motherhood. This dissertation explores how motherhood and motherhood tropes are depicted in some Norwegian diaspora literature and how “the Other mother” is depicted in contemporary Norwegian works written by authors of immigrant background.

My dissertation begins with a contextualization of Norway’s diaspora literature and the public debate surrounding *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel]. Following the first situating chapter is a multi-chapter argument about three different motherhood tropes present in diaspora literature; I refer to these

¹ Authors included in this intersection discussed in this dissertation include: Amal Aden, Roda Ahmed, Mah Rukh Ali, Maria Amelie, Mina Bai, Loveleen Rihel Brenna, Khalid Hussain, Nasim Karim, Masood Munawer, Mala Naveen, Neha Naveen, Eva Norderhaug, Shabana Rehman, Khalid Salimi, Sarita Skagnes & Lene Wikander, Hadia Tajik, and Kadafi Zaman.

motherhood tropes as: 1) the trope of the cultured mother, 2) the trope of the creative mother, and 3) the appropriation of Henrik Ibsen's female protagonist Nora Helmer (*Et dukkehjem* [1897, *A Doll's House*]). Illustrating these tropes shows the presence of a curious, and developing, critique of motherhood found in some of Norway's diaspora literature. The concluding chapter explores one novel, *Desiland* (2010) by Mala Naveen, which incorporates and challenges these three motherhood tropes by breaking with convention. By presenting differing depictions of motherhood, I argue that these works perform an alternate Norwegian identity – one that calls for a radical renegotiation or remapping of the current paradigm of Norwegianness.

As my literary analysis hinges on political and societal discourses, a brief contextualization of this literature's Norwegian framework is necessary. Norwegians have historically understood and defined their country as a homogeneous nation. Norway, which gained its independence from Sweden in 1905, was not originally known as a destination country for immigrants, but as a country with a population prone to emigration. In spite of this outgoing trend, Norway was not entirely homogeneous. Coexisting alongside the white Christian protestant majority population were the Sámi, Finns, Romany, as well as Scandinavian nationals from neighboring countries, among others. Even though Norway has a long history of migration, the country's migrant narrative tends to be treated solely as a present-day political issue (Sturm-Martin 2012). Due to the immigration wave of the 1960s, Norway has experienced the growth of, what political scientists call, a multicultural society. The country has been forced to confront new ways of conceptualizing Norway and Norwegianness. The scholar Anniken Hagelund has noted that the phrase “we are living in a multicultural society” has become a familiar rhetorical trope in Norwegian politics (Hagelund 2003, 182). Grete Brochmann, a Norwegian sociologist, has analyzed the problematic nature of a newly multicultural society, explaining that “[n]ew

multicultural states are groping for good symbols for the new diversity. The traditional national symbols have lost aspects of their force and legitimacy in the conflict with both internationalization and immigration” (Brochmann 2003, 11). As the issues of minorities and migration are unavoidable in politics and everyday life, Norway’s political discourse and policy have begun to explore its past experiences with cultural diversity where they previously stressed the country’s homogeneity (Hagelund 2003, 182). Interactions between the minority and the majority population have been far from conflict-free. The immigration debate began as a push towards integration, with equality as the basis for this policy, but has become a highly politicized issue. The welfare state, created to help all within state borders, is threatened by economic exhaustion and strained by overpopulation as well as overuse. Integration becomes an even more challenging process when immigrant values are perceived to clash with the values of the host country.

The Norwegian national narrative is typified, among other traits, by its commitment to equality, particularly gender equality. Since the 1970s, due mostly to the policies of the Labor Party, Norway has been transformed into one of the most gender-equal nations in the world. However, Anh Nga Longva, in her article “The Trouble with Difference: Gender, Ethnicity and Social Democracy,” challenges the national narrative of equality. Longva exposes the deceptive simplicity of the Norwegian word and concept *likhet*. *Likhet* is the Norwegian word for both equality and similarity/sameness. In Norwegian, to be equal is synonymous with being similar, or the same. The etymology of *likhet* reflects the cultural understanding that to be equal is first and foremost to be alike (Gullestad 1984, 1996, 2002; Longva 2003). The concept of egalitarian individualism is no stranger to the Western world, however many researchers have argued that there is a stronger emphasis on sameness in Norway, as well as the other Nordic countries

(Gullestad 2006). In her article, Longva analyzes how Norway's oppressed others have achieved equality and become recognized members of Norwegian society through redistributive justice. She begins her argument by discussing gender equality, showing that what seem to be extremely progressive and groundbreaking proposals are problematic, because they are shaped on a male rather than a female model, where women are instead admired for "their ability to transcend the traditional image of women as creatures for whom biology is destiny" (Longva 2003, 158). The myth of the "strong Norwegian woman" (who is first and foremost autonomous, a woman who can "have it all") contributes to the pressure for Norwegian women's assimilation to masculine traits. Longva's central argument is that a *mono-gendered* society is not necessarily a *degenderized* society. The policies implemented by the Norwegian government have created a *mono-gendered* society with maleness as the norm (Longva 2003, 158).

Issues of equality are not just a matter of gender, but also of race. In her analysis of *likhet*, Longva also provides a case study of the Sámi, Norway's indigenous population. The Alta river protests² put minority issues on the map in Norway and, due in large part to these protests, the Sámi have since received cultural recognition.³ Cultural recognition, however, was not actualized until after the Sámi in Norway "were subjected between the 1850s and the 1960s" to harsh assimilation policies that have "wrought extensive and, some would claim, permanent, damage on this national minority, such as loss of language and traditions, and a fading perception of history and identity" (Longva 2003, 170). Longva illustrates that the Sámi people

² The Alta river protests, also known as the Alta Controversy, was a popular movement (coordinated by Sámi/indigenous and environmentalist activists) against the development of the Alta-Kautokeino waterway on the Alta river in Finnmark, Northern Norway.

³ Norway acknowledged (in the 1980s) that it is a state founded on two peoples: Norwegian and Sámi; the Sámi (*Sámidiggi*) parliament established in 1989; Norway is a signatory of DRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples); the Sámi language is recognized as an official language of Norway (ETS-148: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

did not receive equality until after they had been forcibly assimilated, or Norwegianized. With regard to Norway's relatively new diverse population, Longva questions the role of *likhet*: how is Norway to reconcile difference based on ethnicity? If ethnic minorities follow the historical trend of Norway's oppressed others (women and the Sámi), today's Norwegian immigrant minorities can hope to achieve redistributive justice only through assimilation/Norwegianization. Is it possible, in the Norwegian context, to break this historical trend and to think about dichotomies (male/female, indigenous/Norwegian, Norwegian/immigrant) in a non-dichotomous way? Is it possible to distinguish between equal and same, and unequal and different? Is an imagined sameness needed to establish "peace and quiet"—in other words, can *likhet* be achieved in multicultural Norway?

Norwegian literature written by authors of immigrant background has engaged with and complicated these questions. Relative to similar trends in Europe, literature written by authors of immigrant background in Norway emerged in the fairly recent past. Within the last three decades, immigrants and their children have contributed to rewriting the national narrative through various forms of literary expression, such as short stories, plays, poetry, memoirs, and novels (Kongslien 2006). In their works, these new authors and performers raise questions of identity, nationality/ethnicity, and location. The first work written by an author of immigrant background in Norway was *Pakkis* [Packi] by Khalid Hussain written in 1986, followed ten years later by the second published novel, Nasim Karim's *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1996) [IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor]. *Pakkis* and *IZZAT* are novels written by young second-generation authors and feature young second-generation protagonists (Kongslien 2007, 209-20). Since 1996, a number of other texts written by authors of immigrant background have been published in Norway by European authors (for example Michael Konupek, among others) as

well as authors considered to be “culturally distant,” with heritage from non-European societies (for example Mala Naveen and Maria Navarro Skaranger, among others) that have explored the integration of adults and second-generation immigrant children, as well as other themes.

Additionally, there are a number of publications by immigrant authors in Norway that are out of this dissertation’s reach as they’re written in languages other than Norwegian. These works are often, but not always, self-published and distributed amongst their communities, both in Norway and abroad.⁴ Variety of form – novels, anthologies, poetry collections, non-fiction, memoirs, and autobiographical fiction – typifies this diasporic corpus of literature. Though diverse in form, there are many thematic similarities. Kongslien points out the following typical themes: collective vs. individual, challenges of the second-generation, integration in a new country, challenges of racism, the hybrid self, second language acquisition, among many others. Since Kongslien’s 2007 article, diaspora narratives in Norway have become almost synonymous with political and/or social activism. In their works, these authors protest and critique the conditions of immigrants in Norway. At the end of this Introduction, I have included a “Working Bibliography of Norwegian Diaspora Literature,” which is a list of all published narratives in Norway written by authors of immigrant background that I could find. With Ingeborg Kongslien’s permission, this bibliography is a continuation of the bibliography she published in *Scandinavian Studies* in 2007.

⁴ An example of this phenomenon is found in Tamil writers. V.I.S. Jeyapalan, Aadhavan (pseudonym for K.S. Sundaram), and E. Thiyagalingam are three authors who publish narratives about life in Norway in the Tamil language. I have my informant Giri Venkataramanan, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, to thank for introducing me to these authors.

This dissertation expands upon Kongslien's article by describing just one of the many narrative patterns found in diaspora literature written from 1986 to 2014⁵ – the existence of three motherhood tropes: 1) the trope of the cultured mother, 2) the trope of the creative mother, and 3) and the appropriation of Ibsen's Nora. I should be clear that though I've created terminology for these tropes, they are not my invention, but instead, they are categorized observations about the values that are contained within the texts themselves. These are not the only tropes or themes found in this diverse literature, but I focus on them because they were so prominent in the literature that they formed a narrative convention. What is more interesting to me is that this narrative convention became so prominent in this discourse that one author, Mala Naveen, felt compelled to rebel against convention. This rebellion paired with a heightened awareness of the meta-discourse of *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel] has ushered in a new era for Norwegian diaspora literature – which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Though some of Norway's diaspora literature written after 2015 discusses motherhood, more recent publications have been more focused on other topics. These topics include: issues of urban immigrant language (Maria Navarro Skaranger's *Alle utlendinger har lukka gardiner* (2015) [All Immigrants Have Closed Curtains]), honor culture and religiosity (Sumaya Jirde Ali's *Kvinner som hater menn* (2017) [Women Who Hate Men] & Mohammad Usman Rana's *Hvordan å elske Koranen og Norge samtidig* (2016) [How to Love the Koran and Norway at the Same Time]), and Islamic radicalization (Adel Khan Farooq's *Mine brødre* (2016) [My Brethren]). Another emerging trend, from 2015 to the present, is a new form of "Oslo østkant

⁵ In Chapter 1, I do include a discussion of Neha Naveen's *Stupekontroll* published in 2015, however this is in reference to the search for the great Norwegian immigrant novel and not in my analysis of the three motherhood tropes.

litteratur” [Oslo’s east side literature], which has moved from a locus of proletariat literature to diaspora literature. Historically, Oslo’s east side was home to the working class and was depicted under the label of *arbeiderlitteratur* [proletarian literature] (for example Oskar Braaten’s writing) but is now a geographical region of the city that is populated by diverse populations and therefore described in diaspora literature (particularly evident in the geography of Skaranger’s and Farooq’s novels).

Migration and integration are popular research topics in Norwegian academe, however Norwegian diaspora literature has been a little explored topic in Norwegian literary studies. Ingeborg Kongslien’s 2007 article “New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives: Contemporary Scandinavian Multicultural Literature” was the first academic study of Norwegian literature written by authors of immigrant background. Since 2007, articles have explored individual authors or characters and some Master’s theses and dissertations have included diasporic Norwegian authors in their projects. Elisabeth Helene Karlsson defended the earliest of these dissertations at the University of Minnesota in 2008, titled “Towards a Multiculturalism for the 21st Century: German and Scandinavian Literary Perspectives, 1990-2005.” Karlsson included the Norwegian-Ugandan poet Bertrand Besigye among her readings of four authors of “immigrant extraction” in Germany and Scandinavia (Karlsson 2008). The most recent example is out of the University of Oslo, where Annika Bøstein Myhr’s 2015 dissertation, titled “Memories out of Place and Season: England, Germany, Russia, Estonia, and Norway in Migration Literature Since 1989,” included analyses of Brynjulf Jung Tjønn’s *Kinamann* (2011) [Chinaman] and Maria Amelie’s *Ulovlig norsk* (2010) [Illegally Norwegian] in her exploration of migrant narratives and identities in Europe (Myhr 2015). However, there is yet to be a dissertation dedicated only to this body of texts in Norway. I believe that it is diaspora

literature's youth, the challenge of categorization, and the perception of being low quality literature that causes these authors to be overlooked in academic studies. My project is therefore not only the first of its kind, but it also aims to legitimize what is usually considered to be fringe literature and what I view as a textual, cultural response to a public discourse and a perceived political problem.

Norwegian and Scandinavian diaspora literature is most often analyzed in the post-colonial framework of "the empire writes back," or challenging national canons by rewriting national narratives or national identities (Ashcroft et. al. 2002). Though my dissertation relies heavily on post-colonial theorists and concepts, I have also made a concerted effort to contextualize these works in their Norwegian framework by prioritizing Norwegian/Scandinavian scholars and ideas in my analyses. One of the reasons I've made this decision is because Norway has historically distanced itself from contributing to the global colonial economy under the justification that it was itself a nation under colonial rule, first by Denmark and then by Sweden.⁶ This is significant to me because I find that this complicated positioning has the potential to undermine the power imbalances inherent in a post-colonial theoretical discussions and it therefore doesn't interrogate the "us vs. them" binary that the post-

⁶ This idea is reflected in Bente Aamotsbakken's research on Norwegian history textbooks. She explains that, "Norway has a rather modest history as a colonial power if we leave out the Viking Age. [...] Another significant perspective on colonization is found in the fact that Norway itself has been a colony under foreign rule for several centuries. Norway got its own constitution in 1814, when the union with Denmark came to an end. In spite of the fact that Norway enjoyed a relatively independent status within the new union with Sweden, the country still had to share king and foreign ministry with the neighboring country. This union was dissolved in 1905, making Norway a young nation compared to most other countries in Northern Europe. It is my assumption that the colonial past has a certain impact on the writing of Norwegian history in general. This impact is easily seen in the emphasis on national independence and liberation movements. During the last decades questions related to colonialism and decolonization have been subject to debate in Norwegian mass media, and these debates have influenced the educational policy and curricular reforms" (Aamotsbakken 2008, 763-4)).

colonial framework seeks to disrupt.⁷ However, emphasizing the Norwegian context in parallel to incorporating post-colonial theoretical thought in my analysis has provided a productive balance between appreciating accepted literary theory and recognizing the uniqueness of these texts' Norwegian context. Another reason for emphasizing Norwegian/Scandinavian scholars and ideas in this dissertation is that I believe that the insightful publications of my Scandinavianist colleagues are undervalued and under-cited for their productive contribution to this dynamic discourse. In addition to emphasizing the Norwegian/Scandinavian context, I have received great insight from interdisciplinary scholars who use the lens of performance studies or performativity. Examples of scholars who employ such a lens of performance studies and/or performativity that I use in this dissertation are Jill Dolan, Christine L. Garlow, and José Esteban Muñoz. Using scholars of performativity assists in my understanding of these texts, as they are works that perform a unique and a new Norwegian identity. Performance studies parallels Norwegian diaspora narratives inasmuch as both lack a theoretical or genre "home" and they are fundamentally interdisciplinary. More importantly, these scholars of performance studies challenge the boundaries and conventions of performance. In a similar way, Norwegian diaspora novels are homeless works that challenge the conventions and boundaries of both Norwegian literature and Norwegianness (the performance of being Norwegian). What is significant is that scholars of performativity and Norwegian authors of immigrant background both push for a move towards new paradigms or a disciplinary remapping of intellectual life as they feel oppressed in their current institutional structure, either intellectual fields or Norwegian

⁷ For a discussion of this critical view of Norway's international positioning, consult Terje Tvedt's "En monologisk samtale" ["A Monologic Conversation"] (Tvedt 2003, 310-12) and "Differensiering og nasjonale selvbilder" ["Differentiation and National Perception"] (Tvedt 2003, 312-15).

citizenship.⁸ These scholars that use performance studies' homelessness, intermediality, and their emphasis on social justice all intrigue me as a fruitful lenses for an analysis of Norwegian diaspora literature.

I recognize that my use of scholars that employ this lens of performance studies is not without controversy; it has a history of being a contested method for literary analysis. An example of this is when Toril Moi, a prominent Henrik Ibsen scholar, once commented that the field of performance studies is a "theoretical wilderness" in which she refuses to "venture" (Moi 1999, 54-5). Because of this controversy I do not claim that my dissertation uses performance studies/performativity as a theoretical framework, however I find that the scholars I use who engage with performance studies or performativity provide ample food for thought in terms of what real-life impact of these diasporic works. Diasporic authors publish their stories in order to introduce the Norwegian public to their public personas or personalities. All of the authors, except for two,⁹ that I analyze in this dissertation have used their writing to establish a public presence and a career in the public eye. Below is a list of examples of how this has played out uniquely for each author:

⁸ This line of thinking is inspired by W.B. Worthen's work on the dislocation of performance studies. Worthen describes that "Like other questions of representation – gender studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, semiotics, to name just a few – performance studies takes place in a variety of institutional locations not currently labeled 'performance studies' departments. This seems to me not a disabling situation, though it is certainly a disempowering one within the institutional structure of the university, and the way to combat it – to inaugurate the 'move to performance studies' – is, of course, to suggest that performance studies constitutes a 'new paradigm.'" (Worthen 2007, 17).

⁹ I have not been able to follow the literary careers or public personae of Massod Munawer and Sarita Skagnes. These two authors are therefore outliers in this claim, however their editor (Munawer's editor is the human rights activist Khalid Salimi) or co-author (Skagnes' co-author is the reporter Lene Wikander) both have careers in the public realm.

- Amal Aden has used her notoriety to support her career as an author, independent lecturer, and a cultural consultant on issues of immigration and integration especially related to immigrants who are female and/or homosexual.
- Roda Ahmed – spouse of Tor Erik Hermansen, co-owner of the famous and astoundingly successful recording and songwriting production company Stargate – used her publication *Forberedelsen* (2008) [The Preparation] to kick-start her company, RodaWorld, which allows her to participate in the immigration debate in Norway though she has resided in the United States (Los Angeles and New York City) for the past decade.
- Mah Rukh Ali published her book at a very young age (14 years old), however it launched her career as a journalist and cultural commentator. She is now a recognized news anchor on NRK, The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Maria Amelie (a pseudonym for Madina Salamova) won the hearts and sympathy of the Norwegian public by publishing her memoirs *Ulovlig norsk* (2010) [Illegally Norwegian] and *Takk* (2014) [Thank You], which highlighted the reality of living as an undocumented immigrant in Norway. Amelie's activism was ultimately successful as she was awarded a work permit in Norway despite lacking the necessary legal documentation. Her activism has also won her a number of Norwegian human rights prizes/awards.
- Mina Bai is an engineer who has, relative to the other authors on this list, recently begun to write. She is an emerging voice in cultural discussions surrounding women's issues as they relate to religiosity and human rights.
- Loveleen Rihel Brenna (also published under Loveleen Rihel and Loveleen Kumar) has great experience as a cultural commentator, an activist, and a writer. She uses her publications to promote her career as a lecturer on diversity (particularly in public

education and the labor market) and her non-profit, Seema, which assists multicultural women in navigating the Norwegian labor market.

- Khalid Hussain published *Pakkis* at a young age. This novel made him a household name in Norway and launched his career as a writer, director, and producer.
- Nasim Karim has used her notoriety as an author of immigrant women's issues in her legal career where she is an advocate for equality, particularly focusing on cases in Norway regarding honor related violence and arranged marriages.
- Mala Naveen (also Mala Wang or Mala Wang-Naveen) is a journalist, author, and a well-read cultural commentator in *Aftenposten*. Though active in Norwegian cultural debates, she currently resides in Brussels, Belgium with her husband and their children.
- Neha Naveen, Mala Naveen's sister, is a recent graduate of *Norsk Barnebokinstitutt* [The Norwegian Institute for Children's Books] and made her authorial debut in 2015. She uses her fame as an author of children's and young adult literature in her activism, particularly educating school children on the importance of reading and writing diverse literature (Espevik 2015).
- Shabana Rehman is a stand-up comedian, public figure, commentator, and author. Of all these authors, Shabana Rehman is probably the most recognized by the Norwegian public.
 - Amal Aden, Shabana Rehman, and Iram Haq¹⁰ have recently (November 2017) established a foundation called "Fødtfri" [Born Free] (also a social media hashtag, #fødtfri). The goal of #fødtfri is that "stiftelsen skal arbeide for felles likestillingsmål på tvers av kjønn, tro og etnisitet." (Rehman) [the foundation will

¹⁰ Iram Haq is a Norwegian-Pakistani actress and filmmaker. She is not discussed in this dissertation, though she is a big player in Norwegian cinema.

work for a common gender equality goal that unites across gender, belief, and ethnicity.]

- Khalid Salimi's writing is directly correlated to his activism. Salimi founded the anti-racism movement in Norway and has been an advocate of using art (both written, digital, and visual) to encourage anti-racist thinking and activism.
- Hadia Tajik began her career as a journalist and creative writer, and used her publications to promote a successful career as an *Arbeiderparti* [Labor Party] politician.
- Kadafi Zaman is a journalist and TV anchor. He is currently a broadcaster on TV 2, a Norwegian commercial television station.

The fact that almost all of these authors present themselves as public actors in Norwegian society emphasizes a performative quality of this literature. These authors use their lived experience, especially when viewed as a success story, to authenticate their narratives and they use their narratives to present their views of Norway's immigration and integration debate.

Though Norwegian diaspora literature addresses a plethora of topics that fall both under and outside of the umbrella of immigration and integration in Norway, this dissertation focuses specifically on motherhood. In Chapter 1, "*Jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen*: Writing Community in Contemporary Norway," I introduce the Norwegian concept of *jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel]. Though many in Norway claim that the country's national canon is still "waiting" for its first great immigrant novel, I take an opposing view in this chapter by addressing the problematic and contradictory discourse of *jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen*. I instead argue that there is a robust tradition of writing diaspora narratives in Norway. I support this argument by discussing issues of categorization amongst literary scholars and I identify a variety of often-

unrecognized actors (in addition to authors of immigrant background, I discuss ethnic Norwegian authors, academics, and activists) who write diaspora narratives or engage in diaspora literature in Norway.

Having contextualized the discourse surrounding Norwegian diaspora literature in Chapter 1, Chapters 2 – 5 serve as a multi-chapter argument about three motherhood tropes. Chapter 2, “Dystopian Memory: The ‘Cultured Mother’ in Diasporic Narratives of Victimization and Violence,” explores the trope of the cultured mother in five narratives.¹¹ The trope of the cultured mother is defined as a force that pulls her second-generation child away from their Norwegianness and places the burden, duty, or responsibility of their “home” culture on the second-generation child. The trope of the cultured mother is present in each narrative and shows how the domestic sphere is a locus of victimization and violence. Often categorized as *ærefortellinger* [honor narratives], the five female protagonist characters employ the trope of the cultured mother in order to present a dystopian memory of their respective honor cultures. Ultimately, these second-generation protagonist women opt to leave their cultured mothers for the protectionism of the Norwegian welfare state.

Chapter 3, “‘Den ene’ [The One]: The Influence of the ‘Creative Mother’ on Diasporic Narrativity,” addresses the second trope of the “creative mother.” The creative mother is an insider (native Norwegian) who cares enough to help an outsider (in this case an author of immigrant background). The creative mother is a character trope found in diaspora literature that inspires the author to complete their journey to self-actualization. This means that the creative

¹¹ Amal Aden’s *Se oss: Bekymringsmelding fra en ung norsksomalisk kvinne* (2008) [See Us: A Concerned Message from a Young Norwegian-Somali Woman]; Amal Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009, 2011) [My Dream of Freedom: An Autobiographical Story]; Nasim Karim’s *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1996) [IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor]; Mina Bai’s *Skam* (2014) [Shame]; and Roda Ahmed’s *Forberedelsen* (2008) [The Preparation]

mother either 1) motivates the author to untether themselves from the oppressive demands of their home culture and/or 2) encourages or inspires the author to write their story. I illustrate this trope using six texts¹² in which characters rely on the creative mother in order to self-actualize and/or publish their stories. Though diverse in their presentation, the trope of the creative mother provides concrete examples of how native Norwegians are influential in individual migrants' socialization into Norwegian society and the trope exists as a narrative tool to help the second-generation author find agency, tell their story, and/or decide their own destiny.

Chapter 4, "The Diasporic Nora: The Appropriation of Ibsen's Nora, Norway's Infamous Mother," centers around Norway's most famous protagonist female, Nora Helmer from *Et dukkehjem* (1879) [A Doll's House]. In this chapter I discuss the scattering of Nora around the world, a phenomenon termed the "global Nora." I then present the existence of a diasporic Nora, or the third trope: how authors of contemporary Norwegian diaspora literature appropriate Nora Helmer. This chapter investigates two explicit references to Nora in order to show that Nora is used as both a source of inspiration as well as a problematic cultural symbol.¹³ The chapter also explores less explicit examples¹⁴ of literary appropriation of Ibsen's heroine, a phenomenon common to Norwegian diaspora literature that I've termed "activating the Nora plot." A frequent occurrence in diaspora literature, activating the Nora plot is when a protagonist character leaves

¹² Khalid Hussain's *Pakkis* (1986); Amal Aden's *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling*, (2011); Hadia Tajik's "Fortellingen om Hadia" (2009) "The Story of Hadia"; Loveleen Rihel Brenna's *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012) [My Otherness, My Strength]; Maria Amelie's *Ulovlig Norsk* (2010) [Illegally Norwegian]; Sarita Skagnes and Lene Wikander's *Bare en datter*, (2007) [Just a Daughter]

¹³ Loveleen Rihel Brenna's *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012) [My Otherness, My Strength], Masood Munawer's poem "Kjæreste" (1988) [Dearest]

¹⁴ Amal Aden's in *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009, 2011) [My Dream of Freedom: An Autobiographical Story]; Nasim Karim's *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1996) [IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor]; Roda Ahmed's *Forberedelsen* (2008) [The Preparation]; and Khalid Hussain's *Pakkis* (1986) [Packi].

their oppressive family situation in pursuit of individual freedom. These authors who appropriate Nora or activate the Nora plot all differ in their activism, however, they all demand to be seen not as victims of their respective cultures but instead as individuals.

In Chapter 5, “Breaking the Narrative Pattern: Mala Naveen’s *Desiland* (2010) and Disidentification,” I conclude this dissertation by analyzing Mala Naveen’s *Desiland*. Naveen’s debut novel picks up on these motherhood tropes from Norwegian diaspora literature and incorporates them thoughtfully and critically into her novel. This concluding chapter explores Naveen’s innovative use of the three motherhood tropes by contrasting them with the previous chapters’ findings. The analysis of *Desiland* shows how the novel breaks from the narrative conventions of Norwegian diaspora literature by not conforming to the three motherhood tropes: the creative mother, the cultured mother, and the appropriation of Ibsen’s Nora. Chapter 5 concludes by arguing that the protagonist of *Desiland*, in her breaking of narrative convention, performs José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of “disidentificaiton.”

Ultimately, this dissertation’s goal is quite simple. I aim first to argue for the existence of diaspora literature in Norwegian literary studies. Though it takes on many different, unique forms, I define it not as fringe literature but as a textual, cultural response to a public discourse and a perceived political problem. I also argue that not only does diaspora literature exist in Norway, but also it has become a well-developed discourse. My analyses of motherhood tropes illustrate this point in two ways: 1) they demonstrate that diaspora literature has established narrative conventions (I present the three tropes: the cultured mother, the creative mother, and the appropriation of Nora – though there are certainly other tropes present in these texts), and that 2) the authors have engaged in a critique of this discourse.

I would also like to use space in this introduction to comment on my intentions and personal perspectives about my dissertation topic. I am fortunate to have had the time, funding, and ability to grapple with these topics of Norwegian migration and motherhood. My dissertation concludes with an example of an author who has disrupted, what has come to be, conventional motherhood tropes in Norwegian diaspora literature in order to disidentify with the history of stereotyping female minorities in Norway. Though I appreciate Naveen's critical perspective on the debate and find her female protagonist's, Mita's, rambunctiousness highly entertaining, it is not my intention to privilege Naveen's voice over the other authors covered in my analysis. As Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed out in her essay on the poetics of diaspora: migration is a tale full of contradictions. She poses the research question: "What happens to the human spirit between worlds, to desire and longing as they cross and recross geographical and cultural borders, to the domains of intimacy and family in migration, dislocation, and relocation?" (Friedman 2004, 190). Having been inspired by this essay about English language diaspora literature, I had a similar quest at the beginning of my research process on Norwegian language diaspora literature. In a close reading of and by listening to the diverse voices of the Norwegian authors of diaspora literature, I learned a lot about, among other topics, familial intimacy in diaspora (or the lack thereof) and the process of belonging (or the lack thereof) in a new society.

As a Norwegian-American living in Madison, Wisconsin, I believe that it has been my role as a researcher (of a topic that is not necessarily "mine" to research) to use my own status as an "outsider" with a type of immigrant identity in Norwegian society to inform my readings of this literature. As an "outsider" researcher, I have both a critical distance and a cultural distance from my source material. I bring a different perspective of Norwegian society and a different understanding of Norwegian literature that benefitted my exploration of, what is often considered

to be, fringe literature. I was most curious about and moved by the contradictions of migratory identities presented to me in these works. The discomfort as a reader to comprehend and as a scholar to categorize the “I am but I’m not,” or as postcolonial theory terms the double identity or hybrid self, inherent to Norwegian diaspora literature has been a fruitful professional and personal process of growth and an investigation into embracing human complexity.

Embracing human complexity means that I tried to understand each author’s unique perspective without privileging one voice over another. Throughout my project, I was only openly critical of Sarita Skagnes and Lene Wikander’s *Bare en datter* as I felt that Wikander (who I termed an “invasive creative mother”) overstepped her role in the storytelling by providing anthropological commentary within Skagnes’s narrative. Otherwise, I figuratively asked that these authors, through their published narratives, teach me what it is like to be an immigrant in Norway. I worry that people or groups often use these diasporic narratives for their own ideological gain or to advance a political goal, which sometimes means that they have been used to fuel bigotry or validate prejudice. Many of these authors, two examples being Amal Aden and Nassim Karim, condemn their home cultures for being violent and intolerant and advocate for Norwegian protectionism – ideas embraced by the anti-immigrant right and radical feminists. On the other hand, other diasporic authors in this dissertation, two examples are Masood Munawer and Mala Naveen, criticize Norwegian intervention and instead encourage cultural relativist attitudes that welcome diversity – ideas embraced by the far left and anti-racists. It was my goal to explore these contradictory diaspora narratives, in order to find commonalities and to recognize a vibrant corpus of literature within academic discourse. Because I hold this scholarly distance, one may find voices in this dissertation that are upsetting, that are uplifting, ones that they disagree with, and ones that they agree with. This body of

literature, like any other literature, is diverse – not because it is written by ethnic minorities – but because it is written by unique individuals who hold differing worldviews. I do believe that I have an important role as a researcher to study these narratives, though ultimately, it is these authors' memories and life experiences. Their works are unique and special, and I'm forever grateful to them for sharing.

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Chapter 1

Jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen: Writing Community in Contemporary Norway

Introduction

“Dette er ikke ‘*den store norske innvanderromanen*’” [This is not “the great Norwegian immigrant novel”] is a common critique of published works in Norway written by authors of immigrant background. Though the corpus of texts emerged in 1986 and many diasporic authors publish in Norwegian,¹⁵ Norwegian diaspora literature is stuck in a type of literary purgatory – cultural and literary critics proclaim in local and national newspapers, on TV, and in advertisements that Norway is still “waiting” for its first great immigrant novel. The search for *den store norske innvanderromanen*, paralleling the discourse of the “Great American Novel,” is basically a hunt for a novel of high literary quality that captures perfectly the immigrant experience, a type of immigrant-national epic, that is worthy of Norwegian canonization. The discourse surrounding the hunt for *den store norske innvanderromanen* is problematic and also troubled by contradiction. Integral to the media’s reception as well as the market audience’s reception is the concept of “Norwegianness” as synonymous to “whiteness.” In order to write the immigrant experience, it is understood that the author is himself or herself an immigrant, preferably one of a culturally different background. The question “who has permission or authority to author narratives of immigrant experience and community in Norway?” is further complicated by a similar question of reception “who has the permission or authority to label a work *den store norske innvanderromanen*?” To satisfy both criteria, *den store norske innvanderromanen* must simultaneously be culturally different and culturally similar, which is

¹⁵ See my working bibliography in this dissertation’s introduction for examples of diasporic authors.

an impossible task. This first chapter explores this contested literature in order to set the stage for a later discussion of motherhood tropes in Chapters 2-5. I will do this by first discussing the categorization of Norway's diaspora literature and then exploring the public debate surrounding *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel]. This chapter adds to the public debate of *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* by taking somewhat of an opposing stance, suggesting instead that there is a robust tradition of writing immigrant narratives in Norway.

Diaspora Literature in Norway and the Problem of Categorization

Although academics generally agree that diaspora literature was established in Norway with the publication of the novel *Pakkis* written by Khalid Hussain in 1986, the naming of this category itself continues to be hotly debated by literary scholars. Ingeborg Kongslien was the first Norwegian scholar to take on the task of categorizing this literature and her work rightfully remains the often-cited academic yardstick for defining what constitutes this category. In her article "New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives: Contemporary Scandinavian Multicultural Literature," Kongslien discusses the problematic nature of naming (Kongslien 2007). Originally termed *innvandrerr litteratur* [immigrant literature], it has since been labeled *multikulturell litteratur* [multicultural literature] or *migrant litteratur* [migrant literature] because, similar to the literary debate surrounding women's literature in the 1970s, the authors themselves felt that the term *innvandrerr litteratur* indicated "a marginal or ghettoized literature with second-rate status," and that it was a categorization "based on cultural generalizations that [are] problematic, especially with recent development toward multiculturalism and globalization" (Kongslien 2007, 198). In a later article titled "Migration, Translingualism, and Appropriation:

New National Narratives in Nordic Literature”, Kongslien expanded upon this challenge of naming and terminology usage regarding new national literatures, she notes:

“Probably what has been most commonly used is ‘migrant literature.’ That may be a valid term when there is a focus on the thematic aspects of the representations of migration experiences such as cultural encounters and integration. Other terms are ‘multicultural literature’, which can be interpreted as indicating that migration contributes to diversity in society and that process and results of cultural meetings demand new narratives. Then, ‘transcultural’ or ‘transnational literature’ denotes movements across borders and plural cultural contexts, while ‘exile literature’ features predominantly a double perspective, and ‘translingual literature’ pertains to both linguistic and referential aspects” (Kongslien 2013, 114).

Other Scandinavian literary scholars have raised their voices in this naming debate. Maïmouna Jagne-Soreau, a PhD Candidate at the University of Helsinki and Paris-Sorbonne, persuasively argues for the term *postinvandringslitteratur* [post-immigration literature] (Jagne-Soreau 2017). A group of Finnish literary scholars, in their volume *Rethinking National Literatures and the Literary Canon in Scandinavia*, use the terminology of “national,” “transnational,” and “entangled literatures” in their methodological considerations for the case of Finland and Finnish literature (Pollari et. al. 2015). Whereas the Danish scholars Mads Bunch and Poul Behrendt, in their book *Selvfortalt: Autofiktioner på tværs: prosa, lyrik, teater, film* [Self-told: Autofiction throughout: prose, lyric, theater, film], place contemporary Danish authors of immigrant background (specifically Yahya Hassan and Maja Lee Langvad) into what they identify as a part of the greater contemporary Scandinavian (debated) literary phenomenon of “autofiction” (Bunch and Behrendt 2015). Presenting this swath of scholars and their respective choices in naming shows not only that this is a new type of literature that is ripe for literary debate, but also that it is a category tied to the author’s identity. Fundamental to an academic naming of this new literature is an interrogation of the author’s race, their ethnicity, their location, their national alliance, their choice of language, and their family background.

Despite these theoretical discussions, the term *multikulturell* [multicultural] has increasingly been used and polarized in Norway. Though “multicultural” as a term has been globally controversial for the past three decades, it is still common use in contemporary Norway.¹⁶ Political scientists agree that the Nordic countries can be characterized as “experiments in multiculturalism”, and these “experiments” have been embraced by some and vigorously resisted by others (Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013, 1). In Norway the term multicultural/multiculturalism has been coopted by the far right as a failure of the naïveté of the Scandinavian welfare model, most infamously and condemningly in 2083 – *A European Declaration of Independence*, the domestic terrorist Anders Behring Breivik’s hateful, white supremacist manifesto (Breivik 2009). Other groups in Norway are actively attempting to reclaim the term from the far-right extremists, one example being “10 undersøkelser av begrepet multikultur” [10 Studies on the Concept Multicultural] an ongoing arts-based research project funded by TrAP (Office for Transnational Arts Production) (TrAP 2016). Due to the contentious political nature of the term and the baggage it carries, I feel that it is no longer a fruitful tool in a literary analysis or in a discussion of literary discourse. Because of my distaste for the descriptor *multikulturelt litteratur*, I would like to add my suggestion to the debate surrounding categorization and/or naming in this dissertation and advocate for the use of the term *diaspora litteratur* [diaspora literature] as I feel it better reflects the realities of modern migration in Norway and sidesteps language that can be easily theoretically hijacked by far-right extremism.

¹⁶ See Stanley Fish’s “Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), and Tom Wolfe (1970) *Radical Chic; &, Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*. New York, NY: Picador.

Although originally a reference to the forced Jewish mass exodus from Israel around 500 BCE, (from the Greek word *diaspeirein* meaning to ‘disperse’),¹⁷ the term “diaspora” in literary theory today refers to the dispersion of any people from their original homeland. The boundaries of the concept of diaspora have been hotly debated in disciplines such as anthropology, literary theory, folklore, and cultural studies that “generally refers to communities of individuals who have been displaced from their indigenous homeland due to colonial expansion, immigration, migration or exile” (Garlow 2013, 16). Avtar Brah explains, “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a ‘homeland’” (Brah 1996, 16). She describes diaspora space, as a physical place where collective identity is constructed within the legal borders of a nation-state however also constantly re-constructed due to the processes of migration. Brah describes one European example: “In the diaspora space called ‘England,’ for example, African-Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as ‘Englishness,’ thoroughly re-inscribing it in the process” (Brah 1996, 209). Additionally, Paul Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, describes the term, in reference to the diaspora of black identity, as being more concerned with “routes” as opposed to “roots,” the experience of migration itself rather than the particular origins of migrants (Gilroy 1993). The concepts of diaspora, as well as diaspora space, offer a more nuanced view than does the term multicultural, which has proven to be inflexibly politically dichotomous, also a capitalist marketing tool (Wolfe 1970; Fish 1997). The term diaspora sidesteps nationality, while simultaneously relies on the notion of the nation and nationhood, and allows authors to transcend

¹⁷ Greek *diaspeirein* ‘disperse’ from *dia* ‘across’ + *speirein* ‘scatter.’ The term originates from Deuteronomy 28:25, “*esē diaspora en pasais basileias tēs gēs*” [thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth.]

the tired “us vs. them” or “Norwegian vs. immigrant” dichotomies typified by the terminology of immigrant/migrant literature or multicultural literature. Differentiating the term “diaspora” from “transnationalism” is Janna Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur’s observation that:

Diaspora refers specifically to the movement – forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nation-states to another. Transnationalism speaks to larger, more impersonal forces – specifically those of globalization and global capitalism. Where diaspora addresses migration and displacements of subjects, transnationalism also includes the movements of information through cybernetics, as well as the traffic in goods, products, and capital across geopolitical terrains through multinational corporations. While diaspora may be regarded as concomitant with transnationalism, or even in some cases consequent of transnational forces, it may not be reduced to such macroeconomic and technical flows. It remains, above all, a human phenomenon – lived and experienced” (Braziel and Mannur 2003, 8).

Mala Wang-Naveen, a Norwegian author of immigrant background, interacts with this human phenomenon of diaspora, whether consciously or not, in titling her novel *Desiland* (2010) [Desi Land]. “Desi” (meaning *land* or *country* in Sanskrit) is a term for the people and cultures of the Indian subcontinent or South Asia and their diaspora; a term that describes similarly shared Indian values and traditions around the globe.¹⁸ As Stuart Hall explains in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” writing a cultural identity in diaspora is a constant transformation, involving “becoming as well as being” (Hall 1990, 225). These definitions of diaspora exemplify how the term does not fall back on simple binaries as do the terminology of multicultural or migrant, this is particularly important as there is significant variety within Norway’s diasporic authors despite the tendency of Norwegian scholarship, media, and its literary cannon to place them under a single header. Diaspora, then, denotes the hybrid way of life and culture in between Norway and the diasporic experience. Diaspora literature has thus “expanded the national literatures with new themes, settings, and fields of reference” (Kongslien 2007, 197).

¹⁸ Naveen’s novel is the subject of analysis of Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

What this chapter hopes to do is to problematize and justify the categorization of Norwegian literature based on its “otherness.” I have offered a succinct definition of the term I prefer to use to identify this contested literature, diaspora literature, while at the same time, calling into question previous category terminology. My intention in doing this is to insert my own scholarly voice into the ongoing Norwegian media debate called *jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen* [the hunt for the great Norwegian immigrant novel], which I will detail below.

***Jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen* [The Hunt for the Great Norwegian Immigrant Novel]**

Mala Wang-Naveen, in a 2008 article in *Aftenposten* titled “Jakten på den umulige roman” [The Hunt for the Impossible Novel], asked “Hvorfor forventes det at en innvanderer skal skrive om innvandrere? Kan en hvit kvinne eller mann skrive den store innvanderromanen?” (Wang-Naveen 2008). [Why is it expected that an immigrant should write about immigrants? Can a white woman or man write the great immigrant novel?]¹⁹ In the article Wang-Naveen interviews a variety of what she calls “multicultural authors” (from England, Norway, and Spain) about their lives as immigrants in their respective countries, and solicits their opinions on whether a white man or a white woman could write their story or vice versa. Mohamed Razane, the author of the book *Leve* [Live], answered “Man kan ikke redusere en forfatter til stedet han kommer fra eller til emnet han skriver om på et gitt tidspunkt. Om man kaller meg en ‘forstadsforfatter’, må man kalle forfattere fra Paris for ‘pariserforfattere’. Det viser hvor absurd denne merkelappen blir, i det minste får det en til å under seg over hva som gjør at journalistene definerer meg etter

¹⁹ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

hvor jeg bor” (Wang-Naveen 2008). [One can’t reduce an author to the place he comes from or to the topic he writes about at a certain time. If you call me a ‘suburban author,’ one must call an author from Paris a ‘Parisian author.’ This shows how absurd this label has become; at least it gets people to think about why journalists define me by where I live]. According to Razane, to be defined geographically is an absurd notion that hinders the creativity of the author and devalues the author’s works.

Jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen raises legitimate questions about both the future of Norwegian literature as well as the need for “The Great American Novel”²⁰ written by an immigrant or hyphenated Norwegian. When journalists claim that there continues to be a *jakt på den store norske innvandrerromanen*, they are often comparing Norway’s canon to its Scandinavian neighbors, Sweden and Denmark. Sweden has the longest history of multicultural literature and also the most well-known author, Jonas Hassen Khemiri – author of a number of novels and plays, most well-known of which are: *Ett öga rött* (2003; *One Eye Red*) and *Montecore: en unik tiger* (2006; *Montecore: The Silence of the Tiger*, 2011). Whereas Denmark has recently produced Yahya Hassan, a Danish poet of Palestinian background, whose self-titled poetry collection, *YAHYA HASSAN: Digte* (2013), is the best selling poetry-debut in Denmark. No Norwegian diasporic author has reached similar critical or popular acclaim nor been as financially successful, either local/domestic or international, as has Khemiri or Hassan. *Jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* then parallels “high vs. low/popular literature” and “high vs. low culture” debates as the literature’s authors in the region appear to lack recognition and legitimization until they outperform their native contemporaries.

²⁰ Piggybacking on American literary discourse, Wang-Naveen uses the term “The Great American Novel” to explain the need of a Norwegian equivalent, as there is no term in Norwegian that suffices (Wang-Naveen 2008).

Evaluating a novel in terms of its qualifications to be *den store norske innvandrerromanen* has become a marker or code in Norwegian book reviews for a novel's quality (in terms of belonging to "high vs. low literature") as well as an ethnic marker for the novel's content. The following excerpts of newspaper reviews, organized chronologically, of works by diasporic authors reveal the application of this code:

- Anne Schäffer's review in *Bergens Tidende* (June 3, 2008) of Roda Ahmed's *Forberedelsen* (2008):

"Å vente på den store norske innvandrerromanen er som å vente på Godot. [...] Jeg tror ikke vi skal vente på den ene altomfattende innvandrerromanen, men lytte til en lavmælt og annerledes heimstaddiktning. Den er her allerede" (Schäffer 2008).

[Waiting for the great Norwegian immigrant novel is like "Waiting for Godot". ... I don't think we should wait for the single all encompassing immigrant novel, but listen to a hushed and different homestead poetry. That is here already.]

- Ingrid Brekke's review in *Aftenposten* (October 20, 2008) of Roda Ahmed's *Forberedelsen* (2008):

"Roda Ahmeds første roman møtes av store forventninger. Både forlag og presse (og kanskje en og annen leser?) har drømt om den 'store norske innvandrerromanen' i årevis. [...] Roda Ahmeds *Forberedelsen* er antagelig heller ikke den etterlengtede 'innvandrerromanen.' Ikke fordi den er dårlig, men fordi den er ikke bredt nok anlagt" (Brekke 2008).

[Roda Ahmed's first novel was met with great expectations. Both the publishers and the press (and perhaps the occasional reader?) have dreamed of the 'great Norwegian immigrant novel' for years. ... Roda Ahmed's *Forberedelsen* is, unfortunately, not the long-awaited 'immigrant novel.' Not because it's bad, but because it isn't broad enough in scope.]

- Jan Thomas Holmlund's review in *Dagbladet* (August 9, 2010) of Noman Mubashir's *Oslostaner: En bollywood roman* (2010):

"Norsk litteratur har vært ensformig og blodfattig, men nå kommer desibøkene til Norge [...] Men Mubashir vil ikke si at dette er innvandrerromanen han selv etterlyste i *Dagbladet* for tre år siden" (Holmlund 2010).

[Norwegian literature has been monotonous and anemic, but now there's a Desi-book in Norway ... But Mubashir doesn't want to say that this is the immigrant novel he called for in *Dagbladet* three years ago.]

- Cathrine Krøger's review in *Dagbladet* (September 22, 2010) of Mala Naveen's *Desiland* (2010):

“Dette er ikke ’Den store norske innvandrerromanen.’ Mye action og null driv fra Mala Naveen” (Krøger 2010).

[This isn’t ‘the great Norwegian immigrant novel.’ Lots of action but no drive from Mala Naveen.]

- Knut Gørvell’s review at the publishing house Cappelen Damm (July 7, 2011) of Romeo Gill’s *Ung mann i nytt land* (2011):
 “I årevis har mange etterlyst ’den store norske innvandrerromanen’ Romeo Gill er en meget sympatisk fremadstormende forfatter som langt på vei skal ha lyktes med dette prosjektet med romanen *Ung mann i nytt land*” (Gørvell 2011).

 [For years, many have been clamoring for ‘the great Norwegian immigrant novel,’ Romeo Gill is a very likable aspiring author who has to a great extent succeeded with this project in his novel, *Young Man in a New Country*.]
- Bernt Erik Pedersen’s review in *Dagsavisen* (January 21, 2014) of Mina Bai’s novel *Skam* (2014):
 “Forlaget Juritzen omtaler «Skam» som «den store innvandringsromanen». Bai selv har blandede følelser for det begrepet.
 - Jeg har hørt mange snakke om «den store innvandrerromanen». Men jeg kan ikke si at dette er en innvandrerroman. Det er en roman om en innvandrer, som handler om både nordmenn og innvandrere, fastslår Bai” (Pedersen 2014).

 [The publishing house Juritzen refers to *Skam* as ‘the great immigrant novel.’ Bai personally has mixed feelings about the concept.
 - I have heard many talk of ‘the great immigrant novel.’ But I cannot say that this is an immigrant novel. It is a novel about an immigrant, that deals with both Norwegians and immigrants, says Bai.]
- Brynjulf Jung Tjønn’s review in *VG* (January 23, 2015) of Maria Navarro Skarangers’ *Alle utlendinger har lukka gardiner* (2015):
 “Debuten er uredd, original og en liten fest å lese. Samtidig er ikke dette ’den store innvandrerromanen’ mange venter på. Til det er boken for knapp. Men Navarro Skarangers debut kan være en viktig døråpner for flere bøker med en multikulturell hovedperson” (Tjønn 2015)

 [The debut is fearless, original, and a little party to read. At the same time, it’s not ‘the great immigrant novel’ many have waited for. The book is too short for that. But Navarro Skaranger’s debut can be understood as an important door opener for more books with a multicultural protagonist.]
- Liv Mossige’s review in *Dagsavisen* (February 4, 2015) of Neha Naveen’s *Stupekontroll* (2015):
 “Debutroman om norsk-indiske tenåringer driver gjøn med ideen om den store norske innvandrerromanen. [...] Neha Naveens debutroman er ikke slik, selv om den blir solgt

inn som en flerkulturell roman. Dette er kanskje uunngåelig når forfatteren selv er flerkulturell, på samme vis som en forfatter er kvinnelig hvis hun er av hunnkjønn?” (Mossige 2015).

[Debut novel about Norwegian-Indian teens makes fun of the idea of the great Norwegian immigrant novel. [...] Neha Naveen’s debut novel is not so, even though it’s marketed as a multicultural novel. This is perhaps inevitable when the author herself is multicultural, in the same way if an author is feminine if she is female?]

There are certainly many more reviews that include the marker of *den store norske innvandrerromanen*, however these eight provide evidence for the claim that the hunt has been alive since 1986 and continues today because the *den store norske innvandrerromanen* hasn’t yet been written. Karianne Bjellås Gilje confirms my observation already in 2007 in her article titled “Litteratur integrer” [Literature integrates],

“Norske medie- og forlagsmiljøer etterlyser fortsatt ‘den store norske innvandrerromanen.’ Siden Khalid Hussain utga *Pakkis* i 1986 har selvsagt migrasjon blitt tematisert i samtidslitteraturen både av flerkulturelle og ‘heilnorske’ forfattere, men innvandring og integrering er ikke sentrale temaer i norsk fiksjonslitteratur” (Gilje 2007).

[Norwegian media and publishing houses are still calling for ‘the great Norwegian immigrant novel.’ Since Khalid Hussain published *Pakkis* in 1986, migration has been a theme in contemporary literature as either multicultural authors or ‘wholly Norwegian’ authors, but immigration and integration are not central themes in Norwegian fiction literature.]

Gilje observes the existence of two authorial camps – white, Norwegian authors and non-white, immigrant authors – and the country is awaiting the literary champion of the second camp, the great non-white, immigrant author. Little change has been made in reviewing this literature since Gilje’s 2007 observations. These eight reviews I collected provide evidence for an ongoing, unceasing quest but also set somewhat arbitrary parameters for what constitutes this elusive novel. As there has yet to be *THE store norske innvandrerromanen*, reviewers and literary critics can only define these books and their authors by what they are not.

Jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen has become such a prevalent and anticipated critique in Norwegian literature that Neha Naveen, in her young adult novel *Stupekontroll* (2015) [Controlled Diving], incorporates the concept with a type of dramatic irony. Neha Naveen has been interested in this debate for some time, having penned a number of articles for *Aftenposten*, of particular relevance is “Tankesultanene kommer!” [The Hunger for Thought is Coming!], where she probed her audience, “Er jakten på en innvandrerroman blitt en konkurranse, der det er om å gjøre å være førstemann, fremfor det å gi ut en god bok?” (Naveen 2008). [Has the hunt for an immigrant novel become a competition, where it’s more important to be the first that to publish a good book?]. As a journalist and an author of immigrant background, Neha Naveen tackles this issue in fiction as well as print media. Her novel *Stupekontroll* follows a year in the lives of two twin sisters of Indian heritage attending high school in Norway. The sisters, Chi and Pari, have “Norwegian problems” but are non-white and attend schools that are multiethnic and/or multiracial. Naveen, in an effort to provide metacommentary about both her role as an author and about the project of *Stupekontroll*, places Chi in an interesting pedagogical situation. Chi is tasked with writing a final paper in her Norwegian course, however, distracted by major life events, Chi is unable to decide upon a topic. Hallvard, her Norwegian teacher, picks Chi’s topic for her – to write about the immigrant novel by comparing *Pakkis*, Norway’s debut immigrant novel, and *Et öga rött*, Sweden’s best-selling immigrant novel.

”Du skal skrive om innvandrerromanen, ved å sammenlikne *Pakkis* og *Et øye rødt*.

Amir ler bakerst i klassen.

– Hallvard! Du kan ikke si pakkis.

– Det er en boktittel, din dust. Se det. *Dust!* Kan si det og, jeg!

Sadiq roper høyt noe om at det er urettferdig at han ikke fikk Pakkis-oppgaven, når han er pakistaner. Hallvard svarer at Sadiq allerede kan alt om å være pakkis, så han kan få lov til å konsentrere seg om noe annet. Klassen ler igjen, mens Amir slår neven inn i skulderen på Sadiq, sikkert glad for at det var Sadiq alle lo av denne gangen. Sadiq smiler lurt og peker på læreren” (Naveen 2015, 103).

[You are to write about the immigrant novel, by comparing *Pakkis* and *Et öga rött* [One Eye Red]. Amir laughed at the back of the classroom.

“Hallvard! You can’t say pakkis.”

“It’s a book title, you jerk. See there. *Jerk!* I can say that too!”

Sadiq shouts about how it’s unfair he didn’t get the *Pakkis* assignment, as he is a Pakistani. Hallvard answered that Sadiq already knows everything about being Pakistani, so he should concentrate on something else. The class laughs again, while Amir lightly punches Sadiq on the shoulder, probably happy it was Sadiq everyone was laughing at this time. Sadiq smiles slyly and points to the teacher.]

Naveen evokes *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* as well as the debate over political correctness, particularly the usage of the term “*pakkis*” a pejorative word for people of Pakistani background or heritage. The innocent, good-natured scene shows awareness, on the author’s part, of how majority and minority populations in Norway interact. The cheerful tone contrasts with the many racist and contentious elements found in each of the novels Chi is to analyze, therefore, in this scene, Naveen provides an infrequently depicted example of a positive, even humorous, interaction between majority and minority cultures.

Naveen expands this intertextual interaction with *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* in a later scene.

“Dagen slutter med to timer norsk. Hun er ikke forberedt denne gangen heller. Både Nina og Sadiq har laget problemstillinger for særemnet sitt. Hallvard virker skuffet når Chi forteller at hun ikke har klart å finne en problemstilling ennå. Han lar resten av klassen lese i bøkene de skal skrive om. Så går han bort til Chi for å hjelpe henne.

– Her er det så mye å ta tak i, Chi! Identitet, kulturkræsj, DEN STORE

INNVANDRERROMANEN! Skriker han ut i klasserommet, sånn at alle snur seg.

– Ja da, Hallvard. Jeg skal skjerpe meg. Jeg har bare hatt litt mye å tenke på.

– Vil du snakke om det?

– Nei takk” (Naveen 2015, 112).

[The day ends with two hours of Norwegian class. She isn’t prepared this time either. Both Nina and Sadiq have already formed theses for their topic papers. Hallvard appears disappointed when Chi explains that she hasn’t managed to find a topic yet. He lets the rest of the class read in the books they’re to write about. Then he goes over to Chi to help her.

“There is so much to write about, Chi! Identity, culture crash, THE GREAT IMMIGRANT NOVEL!” He shouts to the entire classroom, so that everyone turns to look.

“Yeah, sure, Hallvard. I’ll be more diligent. I’ve just had quite a bit on my mind.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“No thanks.”]

Hallvard’s (Chi’s Norwegian teacher) over-eager attitude about *den store innvanderromanen* echoes the tone of Norway’s real world debate on the topic. Hallvard’s character comes across as a fumbling, however lovable, academic eager to find material his students can relate to. As Chi distances herself from Hallvard (but does not disrespect or judge), Naveen, in evoking this societal debate, distances herself from academic inquiry. The novel ends with the sisters confronting their problems together, hand-in-hand, relying on sisterhood, not their teachers, as their coming-of-age facilitator. This distance suggests that Naveen’s intent with her book project is to write a book about Oslo’s youth instead of the great immigrant youth novel that Norway has been anxiously hunting.

White Authors of Diaspora Literature

In contrast to novels written by authors with immigrant backgrounds, two representative novels written by white, ethnic Norwegians that explore similar issues of multiculturalism, integration, and migration and feature a non-white Norwegian as a central character demonstrate some of the challenges of a white Norwegian tackling the project of *den store norske innvanderromanen*. The first is *Hilal* (1995) by Torggrim Eggen. It is a love story, called Oslo’s “East Side Story” in one review (a play on words as Oslo’s *østkant* [east side] is working class and diverse, as opposed to the wealthy and white *vestkant* [west side]), between Thomas, a white Norwegian DJ in Oslo, and Naima, the daughter of a Pakistani grocer (bookkilden.no 1995). Eggen’s book received good reviews and he continues to get fan mail, however he “mener han

ikke fikk noe kred for det. [...] De venter ikke på den store innvandrerromanen fra en peruaner, det er ikke det de sikler etter” (Wang-Naveen 2008). [believes he didn’t get credit for it [...]] They’re not awaiting the great immigrant novel from a Westerner, that’s not what they’re drooling over]. Despite Eggen’s intention, he as an author was correlated more to his white protagonist Thomas, which meant the book was received more as parallel to *arbeiderlitteratur* [working class literature or proletarian literature] as opposed to *den store norske innvandrerromanen*.

Another attempt at writing diaspora literature from the perspective of a white Norwegian male was made by the author Steffen Sørum. Sørum, however, is a much more controversial and politically provocative author than is Eggen. He originally published his book *Fundamentalt nå!* (2002) under the pseudonym Kazzab al-Abyad, which means “the white liar” in Arabic (Treider 2002). *Fundamentalt nå!* depicts an Iraqi refugee, Nabil Tabouq, and his family’s life in Norway. The plot follows Nabil’s journey as a student at Blindern and his daydreams about being interviewed on live TV. The novel also reveals secrets about his life and family members. The novel attempts to be a self-ironic critique of Norway’s *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen*. Sørum explains in an interview that,

“Det er mitt prosjekt; å okkupere historier som ikke er mine. Vi er født inn i vestlig imperialisme. Vi har lært at om ikke ting er gratis, så kan de stjeles. Du kan opponere mot dette. Eller du kan benytte deg av det. Forfattere skal være så politisk korrekte alltid. Vekk med det, sier jeg. Forfattere skal provosere, snu verden på hodet, skape og utforske det uønskede. Litteraturen skal få leseren til å tenke en gang til. Se for deg forfatteren som en snikskytter som plukker ned nøye utvalgte mål, eller som et mindre presist artilleri som bombarderer meningsmurene våre” (Eielsen 2003).

[This is my project; to occupy the stories that are not mine. We were born into Western imperialism. We’ve learned that, if things aren’t free, we can steal them. You’re free to oppose that. Or you can take advantage of it. Authors are supposed to be so politically correct all the time. Away with that, I say. Authors should provoke, turn the world on its head, create, and explore the undesirable. Literature should get the reader to think again.

See the author as a sniper who aims at carefully selected targets, or as a less precise artillery who bombards our opinion's walls.]

Though Sørum received a lot of attention for his project, he claimed his novel was unsuccessful because it was over-shadowed by the works of the more popular, immigrant, and non-white author, Shabana Rehman. Søren blamed his publisher, Gyldendal, for his novel's lack of success, stating that "de ville ha en innvandrerroman som de allerede hadde en oppskrift til. De manglet bare et fjes. Som forfatter opplevde jeg det den gang som veldig provoserende, at man skulle starte sitt forfatterskap som 'innvandrersforfatter' og ikke forfatter" (Wang-Naveen 2008). [they wanted an immigrant novel that they already had the recipe for. They only lacked a face. As an author I experienced it as very provocative, that one should start one's career as an author as an "immigrant author" and not an author]. Søren allegedly received a threat from someone who opposed the plot point where Nabil and his sister had Norwegian romantic partners. The author compares this threat to the Charlie Hebdo attacks and credits it as the reason he will never write a novel again, especially not a novel about Norway's immigrant population (Sørum 2015).

Critique of jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen

To counterbalance the preceding examples of white authors writing diasporic community, let me provide two examples critical of this phenomenon in particular and *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* more generally. Mah Rukh Ali, now a nationally known TV anchor on Norway's TV2, wrote a book at age 14 in which she criticized Norwegian race relations and immigration policy. Her book's title *Den sure virkeligheten* [The Sour Reality] is taken from the author's own characterization of the hunt for the best depiction of immigrant life in Norway (Ali 1997). In her chapter "Jenter og kvinner med annen bakgrunn" [Girls and Women of Immigrant

Background], Ali states, “Det virker bare som et bilde – et tomt bilde. Et bilde som bare er malt, uten farger og følelser, for det er ikke malt av de som dette virkelig handler om. Dette er den sure virkeligheten, en virkelighet som blir en del av innvandrerejenters og kvinners hverdag og som gjør alt så mye vanskeligere” (Ali 1997, 75-6). [It just seems like a picture – a blank image. A picture that’s only painted without color or feeling, because it’s not painted by those that it’s actually about. That’s the sour reality, a reality that’s become a part of immigrant women and girl’s daily life and that has made everything all the more difficult]. In this statement, Ali criticizes the popularized media and published narrative depictions of immigrant girls and women. She believes that such an “outing” of immigrant girls has only led to further questions and questioning on the basis of their skin color, a statement that evokes Judith Butler’s argumentation about “coming out of the closet,” and the performance of gender and sexuality, in her article “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (Butler 1989). While some women of immigrant background may feel accurately portrayed by these narratives, Ali suggests that many immigrant women feel akin to these oppressed women, not in their life experiences, but in the bombardment of questions from the Norwegian media, public, and academics which publicizes the “fryktelig ekstrem” (Ali 1997, 78) [terrifyingly extreme]. Although Ali’s argument reads more as a rant suitable for the depths of the blogosphere than a well-researched societal critique, she touches on the reality of life’s complexity – a nuance not often found in *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen*.

The second example is Zadafi Zaman, who, in his book *Norge i svart, hvitt og brunt* (1999) [Norway in Black, White, and Brown], engages in a discussion of the cultural conflict of marriage and love traditions within immigrant families in Norway – a common plot of Norwegian diaspora narratives – from the perspective of a second-generation Pakistani-

Norwegian male. Zaman discusses how the Norwegian concept of *integrering* [integration] (Zaman uses *integrering* interchangeably with *assimilering* [assimilation]) interferes with narratives of love and marriage. The “scary mysticism” (Zaman 1999, 99) of immigrant love and marriage is seen as unacceptable because “i Norge skal en følge norske lover og norske skikker. Denne setningen er integrering for nordmenn, de som oppfører seg mest mulig lik nordmenn er integrerte, resten bør en stille sterkere krav til” (Zaman 1999, 101). [in Norway one must follow Norwegian laws and Norwegian customs. That sentence is integration for Norwegians, those who behave the most like Norwegians are integrated, the rest one needs to demand more of]. Zaman’s interpretation of integration in Norway is one that takes multicultural immigrants and turns them into Norwegians. He notices that Norwegians so orientalize their immigrant population that “det ville ikke ha overrasket meg hvis en snart begynte å lage actionfilmer om emnet” (Zaman 1999, 99). [it wouldn’t surprise me if someone started to make action films about the topic]. To Zaman, the voicing of these concerns in print narrative, or, the humorous extreme, Hollywood-style action films, is a way of reinforcing the Norwegian fear of inter-familial immigrant violence. At the end of his chapter “Ekteskap og kjærlighet” [Marriage and Love], Zaman writes an open letter to his white countrymen, begging for the ability to stay silent, quiet, and private: ”Men kjære Norge: La ungdommen selv kjempe disse kampene, la oss selv finne våre løsninger. Går det galt, vet vi hvor krisesenteret, Akersgata og barnevernet holder hus, men går det godt, ja da hører dere aldri fra oss! Ikke hjelp oss før vi ber om hjelp, vi vet at vi ikke er hjelpeløse. På forhånd, takk” (Zaman 1999, 110). [But dear Norway: Let the youth fight these battles for themselves, let us find our own solutions. If it fails, we know where the crisis center, Akersgata and child protective services are; but if it’s going well, then you won’t hear from us! Don’t help us before we ask for help, we know that we’re not helpless. Thanks in advance]. For

Zaman, access to narratives of inter-familial immigrant violence steal the agency of immigrant youth to fend and fight for themselves, or to discover their identity as a hyphenated Norwegian citizen. Ali and Zaman both assert that *jakten på den store norske innvandrerromanen* is highly problematic, viewing these narrative depictions as another way to ‘other’ the country’s immigrant population. Zaman even begs that the hunt, the white inquiry into non-white lives, be brought to an end (Zaman 1999).

The Academic and Activist Gaze

In addition to the role that journalists have played in writing Norway’s immigrant narratives, academics and activists have also played a pivotal role in the writing of immigrant narratives in the Norwegian public sphere. Anniken Hagelund, in her article “‘For Women and Children!’ The Family and Immigration Politics in Scandinavia,” states:

“The immigrant family has become a key site of conflict in Scandinavian debates about integration, multiculturalism and ethnic relations. Much-publicized instances of forced marriages, genital mutilation and honour killings have created moral panics where patriarchal immigrant cultures and family structures appear as the major culprits” (Hagelund 2008, 71).

There are three noteworthy ethnic Norwegians, academics and/or activists, who have contributed to this discourse in the public sphere: Unni Wikan, Hege Storhaug, and Marianne Gullestad. Hagelund features two of these in her article, Unni Wikan (whom she appropriately calls “the anthropologist”) and Hege Storhaug (whom she dubs “the activist”) (Hagelund 2008). I would like to expand upon her argument by extracting it from a discussion of policy and including her subjects in a literary discussion. I also add another “successful” (Hagelund’s terminology)

contributor to immigrant narratives: Marianne Gullestad.²¹ My discussion of these contributors will only focus on how they write immigrant narratives and will not include an analysis of their policy positions.

Unni Wikan, now retired, was a renowned social anthropologist at the University of Oslo and winner of the Fritt Ord Prize [Free Speech Prize] in 2004. Her early research focused on Muslim populations and cultures in Egypt, Oman, Yemen, Indonesia, and Bhutan however her most recent research focuses on Muslims within Scandinavia. Fluent in Arabic, Wikan is recognized as a Norwegian expert on Middle Eastern and Muslim cultures. Although she has previously written about immigrant issues in Scandinavia, Wikan's book *Mot en ny norsk underklasse: Innvandrere, kultur og integrasjon* (1995) [Towards a New Norwegian Underclass: Immigrants, Culture, and Integration] is the publication that struck a nerve with the Norwegian audiences and caused a significant societal debate. In this book, Wikan argues that immigrants in Norway were becoming the country's new underclass, something that is not supposed to exist in egalitarian Norway. Moreover, she argues that the economic divide driving this development – in language, employment opportunity, as well as cultural and societal competence – was due to the Norwegian authorities' naïve acceptance and tolerance of "culture" (Wikan 1995, 152). Essentially, in her view, because of the Norwegian acceptance of "culture," immigrant children, Muslim girls in particular, are at heightened risk for human rights abuses. Wikan explains, "Jentene er taperne i de sosiale drama som utspiller seg i ly av det vi kaller kulturkonflikter og troforskjeller. Og hvis rasisme handler om å anvende forskjellige menneskemodeller på individer med andre etniske kjennetegn, så må det sies at jenter i muslimske familier i Norge er maksimalt

²¹ "I use the term successful, not because they are necessarily true or have been universally accepted as such – indeed they have all been controversial – but because accounts such as these have received massive attention and, in my view, are gaining increasing legitimacy among politicians and policymakers." (Hagelund 2008, 74)

utsatt for rasisme” (Wikan 1995, 113). [Girls are the losers in the social dramas that unfold in the shelter of what we call culture conflicts and religious differences. And if racism involves applying different human models to individuals with different ethnic characteristics, then it must be said that girls in Muslim families in Norway are maximally exposed to racism.] Her argument aroused mixed but passionate reactions. Wikan was simultaneously heralded as a champion of feminist and human rights as well as condemned as a racist.

In response to her countrymen’s reactions, Wikan published *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe* (2002). This publication was an English response to *Mot en ny norsk underklasse*, a type of translated and updated argument for a broader English speaking audience – or, as Wikan puts it, “the story of a story, an attempt to provide an overview of a political process in Norway over the past few years that is matched or paralleled in much of Western Europe” (Wikan 2002, 15). *Generous Betrayal*, a fitting title for the book’s argument, argues, similarly to *Mot en ny norsk underklasse*, that Norway (like Europe as a whole) has generously admitted Muslim immigrants and provided them state welfare support. However, in so doing, they have betrayed immigrant women and children by tolerating immigrant “culture.” Wikan published this second book because, in part, she wanted to fight against silencing at the expense of political correctness, as she explains,

“Political correctness is an ailment of our times, especially within liberal academia. And my odyssey is not politically correct; on the contrary, it is an effort to transgress the bounds of a conspiracy of silence that, as I wish to show, has been wreaking havoc with the lives of many immigrants and their children. The children’s fate and future are foremost on my mind. For, as two Pakistani fathers in Norway said, ‘Our generation will soon be gone. It is our children who will continue to live here. Please don’t punish them for our failure to dare to address the problems.’ Courage is needed by all of us – working in consonance” (Wikan 2002, 2).

Although an academic by profession and training, Wikan's project is inherently activist in nature. She purports to give voice and direct attention to immigrant girls' stories that have previously been ignored by the Norwegian public and government authorities.

In these two works, Wikan devoted significant space to depicting the lives of immigrant girls in Norway and Sweden, thereby positioning herself as an integral actor in writing immigrant narratives in Norway. In *Mot en ny norsk underklasse*, Wikan introduces Sima,²² an 18 year-old Norwegian daughter of Pakistani parents. At 16, Sima was taken from Norway to Pakistan by her parents to be married to a distant cousin. Sima refused and escaped back to Norway – her story is depicted as a new Norwegian problem. In *Generous Betrayal*, Wikan allocates even more space to immigrant narratives than she does in *Mot en ny norsk underklasse*, and highlights the life stories of Aisha, Sara, Anna, Noreen, and Nadia. The book begins with Aisha's²³ story, which is referenced and echoed throughout the rest of the publication. Aisha was a Norwegian citizen of Muslim parents from a foreign land (Wikan never mentions which Muslim country). At age 14, her parents took Aisha to be married in their home country. Norwegian child services were unable to do anything to stop her parents, as official Norwegian policy dictated that “children should remain ‘in their culture’” (Wikan 2002, 20). Despite her calls for help, Aisha was never to be seen again in Norway. The second story deals with Sara, a Swedish citizen, who was murdered by her brother and cousin because she was accused by her family of being a “whore and slept with Swedish boys” (Wikan 2002, 91). Sara's honor killing was featured prominently in the Swedish press, and was therefore an effective case study for Wikan's scholarship. Wikan's third account focuses on Anna, a Christian of Syrian descent, whose story is used to illustrate how Wikan's argument is based on the notion of culture, not

²² Sima is a pseudonym

²³ Aisha is a pseudonym

religion, in that non-Muslim immigrants also experience patriarchal violence. Anna, a Swedish citizen, contacted *Expressen*, a Swedish newspaper, with her story in hopes that her voice would be taken seriously. Honor is highly important in Anna's family, which means that she is subjected to regular vaginal exams to ensure that she is still virgin, thereby upholding the family's honor. Anna longs to be a normal Swedish girl but feels trapped in her culture and strict Christian religion. She explains,

...My life since childhood has been like this: going to school, coming straight home, looking after the house, taking care of my younger siblings, cooking, laundering, caring for babies. This since I was six years old. ... I have grown up in Sweden, I feel like a Swede inside, but there is a bit of the old as well. All I ask is to be able to live my life as a Swedish citizen and a free human being, not as a slave bound by my religion. I will fight for my right to live as a Swedish citizen" (Wikan 2002, 102-3).

Wikan does not provide an end to Anna's story, but uses it to illustrate how she has been perpetually held captive by her culture. The fourth example Wikan provides is Noreen, the fictional protagonist of Nasim Karim's book *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1994) [*IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor*]. Noreen, a Pakistani-Norwegian girl, endures a lifetime of domestic violence and eventually is forced into a marriage in Pakistan. Noreen's is a success story as she escapes Pakistan and lives in Norway. Noreen's character is loosely based off of her author's lived experiences and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Finally, the fifth example, Nadia's story, is a complicated Norwegian family court case. Nadia is a Norwegian citizen of Moroccan, Muslim parents. At age eighteen, Nadia was drugged and kidnapped by her parents in order to, allegedly, be forced to marry in Morocco. Nadia sought help from the Norwegian embassy abroad and, with their help and through suspending her father's Norwegian welfare benefits, was returned to Norway. The Norwegian police took Nadia's parents to court where they were found guilty, a historic verdict.

The immigrant narratives in Wikan's publications share common themes and plots. They are stories of girls brutalized by their culture, unable to actualize themselves as the Scandinavian citizens that they are, both legally and culturally. Immigrant girls in these narratives cannot enjoy the rights and protections of other Scandinavian citizens because of their family's violent cultures as well as because of the government officials' naïve commitment to tolerance. Wikan concludes, "I venture the interpretation – based on talks with these officials as well as other professionals (child care workers, teachers, social workers, etc.) – that the one abiding fear that keeps many well-meaning and deeply caring persons from intervening on behalf of the child is the fear of being called a racist" (Wikan 2002, 25). In Wikan's line of argumentation, it is a fear of political correctness, of being termed "racist," that stops government officials and politicians from enforcing basic human rights, even when a woman's life is on the line. The stories Wikan tells in her books aren't meant to serve as outliers, but as illustrative of a Scandinavian epidemic. Wikan concedes, "True, Aisha's family is extreme in some respects. But the plethora of problems they faced is unfortunately not uncommon. Many families struggle with some of the same problems, or with other problems of an equally grave character. In short, being an immigrant in Norway – or the child of immigrants – is a precarious existence. Some win. But many fall by the wayside" (Wikan 2002, 35). These stories may be on the extreme end of the spectrum, but, to Wikan, they are illustrative of a new, and growing, Norwegian phenomenon.

The second academic activist who contributed significantly to the telling of immigrant women's stories is Hege Storhaug ("the activist"). Storhaug is the founder and leader of Human Rights Service (HRS) and a prominent feminist activist in Norway. She is the author of many books and articles, is a contributor to a number of documentaries, and frequent participator in

public debates – focusing mainly on forced marriages and female genital cutting.²⁴ Having been active in Norway's integration debate for years (1992-2002) as a journalist, author and documentary maker, Storhaug made her first great impact with the publication of the report *Feminin integrering: Utfordringer i et fleretnisk samfunn* (2003) [Feminine Integration: Challenges in a Multiethnic Society]. *Feminin integrering* is a lengthy non-profit-style policy report; it includes statistics, an analysis of existing laws, as well as HRS policy proposals. The report's argument is an interesting blend of an answer to Susan Moller Okin's famous question "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" and Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus's concept of focusing microcredit on female entrepreneurship (Okin 1999). HRS claims to be the third voice in the Norwegian integration debate, neither pro-immigration nor anti-immigration, but:

HRS har et annet utgangspunkt – som godt kan karakteriseres som 'den tredje stemmen.' Vi har menneskerettigheter og – plikter i front, med særlig fokus på dem som gjøres sårbare; ikke-vestlige barn, unge og kvinner. Vi har altså anerkjent at innvandringen har medført import av uønskede praksiser som er uforenelig med et velfungerende demokrati og fleretnisk samfunn. Vi har også anerkjent at den politikken som generelt har vært ført i Europa, har hatt et svært maskulint preg. Satt på spissen har tankesettet til de ulike regjeringene vært (og er fremdeles langt på vei): 'Få far i arbeid, og integreringen vil gå seg til over tid.' *Vårt motto er derimot: 'Integrer mor, og to tredjedeler av jobben er gjort, for mor integrer barna'* (Storhaug & HRS 2003, 12; italics in original).

[HRS takes a different point of departure – which can be characterized as 'the third voice.' We have human rights and duties in the foreground, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable; non-Western children, adolescents, and women. We have also recognized that immigration has led to an importation of undesirable practices that are incompatible with a well-functioning democracy and multiethnic society. We also recognize that the policy that has generally been applied in Europe has had a very masculine character. To put it bluntly, the crux of the varying governments has been (and continues to be): 'Get the father into the workforce, and integration will happen over time.' *Our motto is, however: 'Integrate the mother, and two thirds of the job is done, because the mother integrates her children.'*]

²⁴ I have chosen to use the term female genital cutting in my dissertation for the controversial practice of female circumcision, though the World Health Organization labels the practice female genital mutilation (FGM) (World Health Organization).

HRS argues for a gendered integration policy that allows government intervention in the private sphere of the family. As they view the immigrant mother to be the key to successful integration, HRS's report emphasizes customs, laws, and cultural practices that HRS believes to strip women of agency. The report focuses mostly on the trend of importing foreign spouses to Norway via family reunification laws, which HRS sees as a problem specific to Muslim immigrants with large families. The "problem" arises, as HRS argues, when these marriages are contracted by force and perpetuate a cycle of domestic violence, in which the husband abuses his wife (in some cases, wives) and children. Not only is this a problem for immigrant women and children, these violations of human rights compromise the democracy and values of the Norwegian welfare state.

In addition to statistics and legal analysis, *Feminin integrering* relies heavily on case studies detailing the plight of immigrant women in Western Europe, particularly Norway. The report's popularity and resulting political influence made Norwegian politicians and the Norwegian public familiar these case studies and they contributed significantly to the tradition of writing immigrant narratives in Norway. The protagonists of this report are Mina (Norway), Jeanette (Norway), and Hawa Kante (France), however their accounts are strengthened by anonymous quotes and/or information from women who had sought HRS's services.

The first case study deals with a woman who only sought HRS assistance out of desperation. Mina was introduced to HRS by hospital staff when she was admitted for injuries sustained from domestic violence, having been beaten by her husband. From an unidentified Muslim country, Mina refused the services of a crisis center, as it would bring shame to her family, who called it a "whorehouse" (Storhaug & HRS 2003, 126). After suffering 14 years of abuse, Mina had enough and wanted out of the marriage. However, according her family's interpretation of their Muslim faith, women are not allowed to initiate divorce and she therefore

faced death threats from her husband and family. While assisting Mina with her case, HRS uncovered a complex family tree (illustrated on page 130 of the report) with multiple “marriages of conveniences” that took advantage of Norway’s family reunification laws. After collaborating with *Barnevernet* [Child Protective Services], HRS and Mina learned that at least one of her daughters and a few of her nieces had been sexually assaulted at the hands of their uncles, fathers, and brothers. Mina was beaten a second time and hospitalized because of her defiance and collaboration with Norwegian authorities. Her status at the time of the book’s publication was somewhat discouraging; Mina and her husband were still separated however Mina’s family had issued an ultimatum that either Mina return to her husband or they would find her a new husband in their home country. Mina’s husband was already arranging a marriage with a younger woman in his home country; he was planning to bring her to Norway and would agree to a divorce if this was successful.

The second case study focuses on Jeanette, who was the first, and at the time of publication, only immigrant woman in the study who chose to go public with her story. Jeanette is a 27 year-old Norwegian woman born to Pakistani parents. At age 16, Jeanette was forced to marry an older man. The wedding night came as a painful shock to the young girl, whose mother’s only instructions had been that Jeanette’s new husband had unlimited access to her body. Having had little to no sex education, it wasn’t until she became pregnant that Jeanette understood the correlation between sex and pregnancy. In Jeanette’s words, “Foreldrene mine arrangerte ikke ekteskapet mitt, de arrangerte voldtekten min” (Storhaug & HRS 2003, 180). [My parents didn’t arrange my marriage they arranged my rape.] Jeanette escaped Pakistan to Norway and remained unmarried in Norway, justifying it to her parents that she would reap more social welfare benefits as a single mother. Her parents agreed and continued to live in Pakistan;

at the time of publication they had arranged for a divorce in Pakistan so that Jeanette was ready for a new marriage.

The third case study features Maryia Kante (38 years old), a French example HRS uses in their report to illustrate these human rights abuses as a pan-European problem. Maryia is from Mauritania and moved to France in 1981. Her husband, Muhamedi Kante, is 69 years old and they have seven children together, her husband also has eight other children with two other women. Their oldest daughter, Hawa, was brought back to Mali with her mother (who was from Mali, which borders Mauritania) in order to be cut. When French authorities discovered Hawa's female genital cutting, they took her parents to trial, as female genital cutting is illegal in France. Mariya, despite having lived in France for over 20 years, required an interpreter and was uncooperative with the judge. Muhamedi testified in French but knew little about the domestic sphere of women; he also appeared uninterested in his daughter's wellbeing. After expert testimonies from doctors, psychologists, and the police, the judge sentenced Mariya Kante, Hawa's mother and perpetrator, to three years in jail and three years probation afterwards, in addition to a 15,000€ fine.

Thanks to Storhaug's report these narratives circulated in Norwegian society and even appeared in American media, becoming the lived examples of Norway's immigration problem (Bawer & International Herald Tribune). These stories depict the abuse of immigrant women at the hands of the immigrant patriarchy. The report does recognize that these narratives don't depict every immigrant family in Norway, however HRS does characterize the narratives as representative of enough large immigrant families to warrant concern (Storhaug & HRS 2003, 141). To translate these oppressive narratives to a Norwegian audience, HRS uses Norwegian

literary history, particularly the Modern Breakthrough, to illustrate the severity of the women's human rights abuses.

“Dette kvinneundertrykkende bildet kjenner vi igjen fra tidligere norsk (kristen) historie, der kvinner ble ansett som mannens eiendom – også i ektesengen. Våre store forfattere på slutten av forrige århundre som Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Gabriel Scott, Jonas Lie, Camilla Collett og Amalie Skram, har alle gjennom skjønnlitterære verker beskrevet kvinners (og menns) tragiske ekteskapelige skjebner” (Storhaug & HRS 2003, 185).

[This image of the oppressed woman we recognize from earlier Norwegian (Christian) history, where women were considered a man's property – also in the marriage bed. Our great authors at the turn of the last century, such as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Gabriel Scott, Jonas Lie, Camilla Collett, and Amalie Skram, have all via literary works described women's (and men's) tragic marital fates.]

HRS draws a parallel between Norway's literary past and the narratives they present of Norway's current, real-life residents. In doing this, the non-profit strengthens the tradition of writing immigrant narratives.

The third and final academic activist I want to discuss is Marianne Gullestad, who was a Norwegian domestic anthropologist at the University of Oslo. Gullestad was known for her use of narratology in her anthropological studies, meaning that she analyzes personal narratives (also termed autobiographical accounts) as part of her anthropological experiments.²⁵ The field of anthropology usually implies an analysis of an outside culture, however Gullestad's anthropological focus was domestic; her subject was Norway, or occasionally Scandinavia more generally. As a scholar, she was interested in how her subjects “wrote” their life stories, and consequently how they understood themselves in relation to Norway as a nation, or

²⁵ *Kitchen-Table Society. A Case Study of the Family Life and Friendships of Young Working-Class Mothers in Urban Norway* (1984); *Imagined Childhoods: Self and Society in Autobiographical Accounts* (1996); *Everyday Life Philosophers: Modernity, Morality and Autobiography in Norway* (1996); *Det norske sett med nye øyne. Kritisk analyse av norsk innvandringsdebatt* (2002); *Plausible Prejudice: Everyday Practices and Social Images of Nation, Culture and Race* (2006); *Misjonsbilder. Bidrag til norsk selvforståelse. Bruk av foto og film i tverrkulturell kommunikasjon* (2007)

“Norwegianness.” Gullestad’s early publications explored the lives of working-class mothers in Norway, but as the little country experienced an influx in immigration, her research shifted to include new-Norwegians as well as nationalism. Her most significant contribution to the writing of immigrant narratives is her debate with Shabana Rehman, a Pakistani-Norwegian stand-up comedian, journalist, and public figure.

Gullestad and Rehman had a very public debate within the pages of *Dagbladet* in 2002 (Gullestad 2002). This debate brought the issues of immigration, integration and political correctness into the homes of many Norwegians.²⁶ During these debates Gullestad criticized Rehman’s assimilatory stance, saying that “med hennes støtte har majoritetsmediene kunne dramatisere minoritetsfamiliers undertrykkelse av sine kvinner, uten på same mate å ta opp ‘nordmenns’ diskriminering på utesteder, boligmarked og arbeidsmarked” (Gullestad 2002) [with her support, the majority media can dramatize minority families oppression of their women, without at the same time taking up ‘Norwegians’ discrimination at clubs, the housing market and the labor market.] Gullestad argued that by focusing solely on female oppression, Rehman ignores systematic racism experienced by members of the Pakistani community. Furthermore, Gullestad argues that by centering her argument on the institutionalized gender equality discourse in Norway, Rehman excludes migrants as ‘others’ and justifies their oppression on the grounds of being gender non-equal. Rehman reinforces and recreates essentialized and Orientalist stereotypes that justify the marginalization of the Pakistani community (Gullestad 2004).

²⁶ As Gullestad explains in her book *Plausible Prejudice*, Norwegians are enthusiastic consumers of news media. It is common for many Norwegian households to have subscriptions to 2-4 Norwegian newspapers, which they receive and read on a daily basis (Gullestad 2006).

Gullestad, also a media skeptic, continues her critique of Rehman by further outlining the problematic nature of minority women in the Norwegian media. Rehman's critiques have been raised by other minority figures in Norway, though not so boldly. Rehman is an integral part of what Gullestad termed a "star system" that has developed in the Norwegian media, whereby specific minority women are "superprivileged" and extremely visible. These superprivileged minority women make it possible for Norwegian society to disregard the points of view of most the minority community while celebrating certain celebrity voices. Gullestad, sees Rehman as a gift to the Norwegian media, which currently, like so many other media outlets, suffers from decreasing sales, because she is extreme, controversial, entertaining and fresh. But Rehman, as a member of the "star system", is also a contradiction. She is a contradiction because, as a celebrity, she was chosen because of her minority background but she at the same time betrays this background – her minority background is simultaneously very important and not important at all. Gullestad clarifies this inconsistency explaining that "by identifying strongly and publicly with hegemonic ideas and values, ['superprivileged' minority celebrities] symbolically transcend their background to become honorary Norwegian nationals" (Gullestad 2006, 51).

Rehman responded to Gullestad's critique in an article that became a chapter in *Mullaløft* [Lifting the Mullah], Rehman's 2004 book, titled "Hvem skygger for hvem?" (Rehman 2004, 53-9) [Who is Throwing Shade at Whom?] In the chapter, Rehman defends her right as a woman of Muslim heritage to demand the same benefits and gender equality that native Norwegian women enjoy. Rehman explains, rather aggressively,

"Men dere har ingen rett til å ta fra oss de godene som kvinner i deres generasjon nyter. Vi vil ha kake. Vi vil være selvstendige, intellektuelle bidragsytere til en utviklende samfunnsdebatt. Vi har like mye rett som dere til å frigjøre oss fra lydighetskravet. Skulle vi, som du skriver, akseptere at lydighet er et fritt valg? Hvilken filosofitime sov du i?" (Rehman 2004, 54).

[But you have no right to take from us the benefits that women in your generation enjoy. We want cake. We want be independent, intellectual contributors to an evolving societal debate. We have as much a right as you to free ourselves from the obedience requirement. Should we, as you write, accept that obedience is a free choice? Which philosophy class did you sleep through?]

Here, Rehman questions why, as a Norwegian citizen of migrant background, she should not also be afforded the rights and benefits that Norwegian women have received as a result of modernity. She continues by describing the problems she has with Islam. She recognizes her Muslim heritage saying that she has “en troende muslimsk mor” [a believing Muslim mother] and “muslimskfødte brødre” [Muslim born brothers] (Rehman 2004, 58). However, she “kritiserer dem som ikke vil diskutere tabuene i religiøs praksis. Jeg godtar ikke at unger skal sitte og pugge religiøse tekster mens imamene klår på dem og ungene ikke vet hva de pugger” (Rehman 2004, 56). [criticizes those who do not want to discuss taboos in religious practice. I do not agree that youths should sit and memorize religious texts while Imams explain it to them and the youths do not even know what they are memorizing]. Rehman disagrees with Gullestad’s analysis that she is justifying the exploitation of her immigrant community. Instead she sees her diasporic context as providing an opportunity that is beneficial in advocating for both women’s rights and a reinterpretation of her Muslim religion, heritage, and culture.

Gullestad’s scholarship and participation in media debates have shaped the writing of Norwegian immigrant narratives by countering the accepted societal narrative of the beaten woman immigrant at the hands of immigrant men. In doing this, Gullestad both questions and problematizes the notion of Norwegianness as a concept synonymous with whiteness as she spends time analyzing both white and non-white Norwegian citizens in her publications.

Conclusion

This chapter presented and complicated the concept “*jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen*” by discussing a variety of authors, both fiction and non-fiction, that write diaspora narratives in Norway. Briefly unpacking the authors presented in this chapter shows evidence of a robust discussion of migrant narratives and diaspora literature, those being: an *østkant* vs. *vestkant* socioeconomic divide (Eggen), white/Western imperialist exploitation (Sørum), white lies (Sørum), an emphasis on the *fryktelig ekstrem* (Ali), reliance on social welfare programs (Zaman), an obsession with tolerance in regards to culture (Wikan), domestic violence against immigrant women perpetrated by immigrant men (Storhaug), and justifying discrimination based on race (Gullestad). Looking at this combination of themes, *jakten på den store norske innvanderromanen* could be interpreted also as a literary metaphor for a very real political and societal hunt into the roots of a collective national guilt based on, what Unni Wikan has called, a growing *ny norsk underklasse* [new Norwegian lower-class] (Wikan 1995). Building upon this contextualization and moving forward the next chapters of this dissertation continues to challenge the notion of *den store norske innvanderromanen*. This chapter showed that diasporic narratives are being written and have been discussed in Norway for quite some time. My future chapters rely on this observation and solidify diaspora literature even further. I argue not only that there are many active diasporic authors in Norway today, but also that this literature is established enough to have developed common narrative tropes, and that these tropes are also being debated within the literature.

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Chapter 2

Dystopian Memory: The “Cultured Mother” in Diasporic Narratives of Victimization and Violence

Introduction

The cultured mother, the first trope, is a force that pulls her second-generation child away from their Norwegianness and places the burden, duty, or responsibility of their “home” culture on the second-generation child. Mother characters are often used in literature as symbolic “national reproducers” of culture and are expected to uphold culturally “appropriate behavior” in order to be the “intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course, the mother tongue” (Modood and Werbner 1997, 196). The idea of the cultured mother is found in a variety of scholarly fields and has multiple names: in folklore studies it is called a bearer of tradition,²⁷ anthropologists and sociologists label it as culture bearer,²⁸ in post-colonial theory it is often referred to as the diasporic mother,²⁹ and in contemporary Norwegian literary criticism it takes the name bad mother or absent mother.³⁰ As this trope is no stranger to Norwegian diaspora literature nor is it to the Norwegian national canon, the word “cultured” in the trope of the cultured mother is meant to highlight intersecting trends in Norwegian literature.

²⁷ The Scandinavian folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow describes this phenomenon in relation to the dissemination of fairy-tales in migration. “On the Spread of Tradition.” Sydow, Carl Wilhelm von. *Selected Papers on Folklore*. New York: Arno Press, 1977, 1948, pp. 11-43.

²⁸ So common is the use of “culture bearer” that it can be found in academic dictionaries, for example the *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, 4rd edition. However practitioners and academics are constantly redefining the concept of culture bearer, paralleling the concept of culture.

²⁹ In *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha explains the diasporic mother as, “more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications gender, race or class – than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism” (1994, 292).

³⁰ Melissa Gjellstad discusses the prevalence of “bad mothers” in contrast to the image of “good mothers” as a theme prevalent in 1990s Norwegian literature, most notably in the authorship of Trude Marstein, Hanne Ørstavik, and Linn Ullmann. She cites credible Norwegian literary critics Tom Egil Hverven, Irene Iversen, Trude Hansen, and Marta Norheim as they investigated and wrote about this theme in the 1990s (2004, 81-5).

The word “cultured” highlights the politicized and nationalistic features of the mother’s acculturation process on her offspring – this chapter discusses this phenomenon with an emphasis on the daughter.

The trope of the cultured mother predates the ethnic heterogeneity of contemporary Norwegian literature, demonstrating that it is not limited to characters or texts with a non-native Norwegian origin. Not only found in literature written by authors of racial and/or ethnic backgrounds that seem Other to the West, the cultured mother has universal application. To demonstrate this, I would like to offer two examples of the cultured mother from the Norwegian canon before proceeding with examples of the cultured mother in Norwegian diaspora literature. Beret Hansa, Vesterheim’s³¹ most famous prairie mother, is an iconic example of the cultured mother. In O.E. Rølvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* trilogy, a tetralogy in the Norwegian original editions,³² Beret, the Hansa/Holm family matriarch, clings to the memories of her fatherland and lives in constant fear of her future on the Dakota prairie. She finds comfort only in her strict religious faith and memory of home. Suffering from mental illness, Beret sometimes hides in her immigrant chest as it symbolizes what’s left of there (Norway), here (in America). In the last two books, the absence of the father, Per Hansa, and his enthusiastic attitude towards assimilation allows Rølvaag to highlight Beret’s maternal duty in the processes of emigration, immigration, and integration. Peder Victorious, Beret’s only American-born son, attends two different schools, which is where he develops a sense of belonging to the greater American community. Beret is troubled by her son’s transformation as she sees her son’s adaptation of American culture to be

³¹ Vesterheim, literally translated as “Western home,” is the term used to describe Norwegian settlements in America, past and present.

³² *I de dage: Fortelling om norske nykommere i Amerika* (1924) and *I de dage: Riket grundlægges* (1925)[*Giants in the Earth* (1927)], *Peder seier* (1928) [*Peder Victorious* (1929)] and *Den signede dag* (1931) [*Their Fathers’ God* (1931)].

an attack on or rejection of her Norwegian culture. At one point Beret tries to burn down the school Peder Victorious attends, convinced she is doing God's will, crying, "*Herre, hjælp mig at røkte dit ærend!*" (Rølvaag 1928, 353). ["O God, help me to carry out Thy will!" (Rølvaag 1929, 311)]. She unsuccessfully attempts to destroy an establishment that symbolizes her son's inclusion into the greater American community because she does not want him to disconnect himself from the Norwegian identity she has tried to pass on to him. In these novels, Beret, the immigrant mother, typifies and symbolizes the preservation of Norwegian heritage in the new immigrant location.

The cultured mother, or a mother character that upholds and enforces (often oppressively patriarchal) societal values, is prevalent also in the Norway's mid-19th century national canon. In fact, it features in the central conflict of Camilla Collett's renowned *Amtmandens Døtre* (1854, 1855) [*The District Governor's Daughters*], Norway's first feminist novel. Sofie Ramm, the novel's protagonist, is raised to be a housewife and mother. Sofie's intelligent spirit aspires to break the traditional female mold, as evidenced in her creative visits to her *Grøtten* (grotto) and her relationship with Kold, the family's hired tutor. However, her cold-spirited mother, Fru Ramm, stifles Sofie's spirit and convinces her to follow traditional Norwegian social conventions. In an argument with Kold, Fru Ramm haughtily describes a woman's duty:

"Jeg egtede min Mand uden Lidenskab, og vort Egteskab har desuagtet vært lykkeligt. Jeg har sat min Lykke i Resignation og i Opfyldesen af mine Pligter. Mine ældste Døtre har heller ikke giftet sig af Tilbøielighed; men de er blevne lykkelige Koner alligevel – [...] – Og mine Døtre,' sluttete Fruen, 'vil engang takke mig derfor, takke mig, fordi jeg har lært dem, at Fornægtelse er et Fruentimmers skønneste Dyd.'" Hun reiste sig majestætisk (Collett 1855).

[I married my husband without passion, and our marriage has nevertheless been a happy one. I found my happiness in resignation and in the fulfillment of my duties. Nor did my eldest daughters marry from inclination, but they have yet become happy wives... [...] – 'And my daughters,' said Mrs. Ramm in conclusion, 'will thank me for it some time;

thank me because I have taught them that self-denial is a woman's most exquisite virtue.' She got up majestically (Collette 1991, 183).]

This scene shows Collett's recognition of the integral role a maternal character plays as a caryatid³³ for Norwegian patriarchy.

Examples of the Cultured Mother in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

The following experiences of five female protagonists – Yasmin, Amal, Noreen, Sara, and Zara – with their respective cultured mothers reveal the ubiquity and consistency of this trope in contemporary Norwegian diaspora literature. The stories are organized by complexity, beginning with the most stereotypical depictions of cultured mothers and moving to more nuanced, or complicated portrayals of cultured mothers. These cultured mothers have much in common: they're all non-ethnically Norwegian, they pull the protagonist character away from their desired Norwegian enculturation, and they all serve as tools of the patriarchy. However, these cultured mothers differ in significant ways as well. They vary in their extremism, religious thought (e.g. fundamentalist vs. faithfully feminist vs. culturally religious), violent attitudes, and access to social power.

Yasmin's Mothers

³³ I find the term "caryatid," a term borrowed from Susan Brantly, to be a suitable descriptor for this trope. Brantly uses the term "caryatid" in her book *Understanding Isak Dinesen* to describe a female character type. She explains, "The image of the caryatid derives originally from Greek architecture, where female figures were used as pillars to hold up the roofs of great buildings. The caryatid has been trained to uphold patriarchy and tradition. If she is married, the caryatid will focus her energy on producing a male heir to ensure the continuance of the family name. If she is not, the caryatid will dedicate herself to supporting the memory of the male heir and the honor of the family..." (Brantly 2002, 10).

The most explicit example of a cultured mother is found in Amal Aden's book *Se oss: En bekymringsmelding fra en ung norsksomalisk kvinne* (2008) [See Us: A Concerned Message from a Young Norwegian-Somali Woman]. *Se oss* is a fictional memoir about Yasmin, a 14 year-old Norwegian-Somali girl. The author frames the story in relation to problems within the Somali community in Norway, particularly human rights of young Somali girls. Aden explains that she regards *Se oss* as,

“...mitt bidrag til å gjøre det norske samfunnet bedre. Boken er min hjelpende hånd til de mange somaliske barn og unge som føler at verden har vendt seg bort fra dem. Jeg ønsker at barn og unge i det somaliske miljøet i Norge skal få vite at det er noen som bryr seg, og jeg vil gi dem et lite håp om at fremtiden kan bli bedre – mye bedre” (Aden 2008, 11).

[...my contribution to making Norwegian society better. The book is my helping hand to the many Somali children and youth who feel that the world has turned away from them. I hope that children and youth in the Somali environment in Norway will know that there is someone who cares, and I want to give them a little hope that the future can be better – much better.]³⁴

The book begins with a scene from Yasmin's circumcision, a rite of passage directed by her mother. Yasmin's mother is only ever called “mor” [mother] and is described as Yasmin's oppressor, a wedge between Yasmin and her Norwegian acculturation process, and a drain on the Norwegian welfare system. Yasmin's mother supervises Yasmin by keeping her indoors, physically separating her from Norwegian society. Yasmin describes that:

”Moren min reiser mye. Når hun er ute og reiser får jeg ikke lov til å gå ut, da får jeg ikke lov til å gå på skolen. Da må jeg si til skolen at jeg er syk. Mange andre synes jeg er heldig som har både mor og far, men jeg skjønner ikke hva som er vitsen med å ha en far jeg aldri ser, og en mor som er sliten hele tiden. Hun vil ikke at jeg skal gå ut, og hun spør aldri hvordan jeg har det” (Aden 2008, 18).

[My mom travels a lot. When she is out traveling, I'm not allowed to go out, I'm not even allowed to go to school. Then I have to tell the school that I am sick. Many others think I am lucky that I have both a mother and a father, but I don't know what's the point with a father I never see and a mother who is tired all the time. She doesn't want me to go out, and she never asks how I am doing.]

³⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Yasmin isn't trusted outside the home when her mother isn't present, not out of concern for Yasmin's well-being, but from fear that Yasmin will deviate from accepted Somali mores. This fear of Yasmin becoming Norwegian is evident later in the narrative when Yasmin is permitted to spend time with friends after school. Her mom is irate when Yasmin comes home later than she had expected, Yasmin describes that "Mamma kommer mot meg i entreen og skriker om hvor jeg har vært hele dagen, og jeg sier at jeg var jo bare borte en time. Da blir hun enda surere. Hun spør meg om jeg vil sove hos hvite folk, er det det du vil, vil du bli hore, synes du det er så fælt å være hjemme?" (Aden 2008, 18) [Momma comes towards me in the entryway and yells about where I've been all day, and I say that I was only gone for one hour. Then she gets even angrier. She asks me if I want to sleep over at white peoples' houses, is that what you want, do you want to be a whore, do you think that it's so bad to be at home?] Yasmin's mother draws a clear binary between Norwegian vs. Somali, white vs. black, bad vs. good. Furthermore, Yasmin's mother uses their family's religion to further the Norwegian vs. Somali binary: "Mamma kaller meg så mye stygt; hun kaller meg hore, det er grusomt sårende. Mamma spør om jeg vil bli som de norske, om jeg vil bli kristen?" (Aden 2008, 39). [Momma often says mean things to me; she calls me a whore, it is extremely painful. Momma asks if I want to be like the Norwegians, if I want to be Christian?] Religious, racial, ethnic, and moral difference are used as ways of controlling Yasmin and keeping her from the integration process she desperately seeks and desires.

Yasmin expands the cultured mother to encompass all the Somali mothers in Norway. She describes scenes at her Somali classmates' homes:

"Noen av damene har syv barn, men sitter her hele dagen uten å ringe hjem for å spørre hvordan barna har det. De prater veldig mye om penger og barnetrygd, jeg hører hele tiden prat om barnetrygd, overgangsstønad, kontantstøtte og barnebidrag. Det virker som

om damene er eksperter på det norske trygdesystemet. Barnetrygd er visst på en måte mye viktigere enn barnet” (Aden 2008, 64).

[Some of the women have seven children, but sit around [at my house] the whole day without calling home to see how their children are doing. They talk a lot about money and child allowance, I hear them talk all the time about child allowance, single parent support, cash benefit, and child support. It seems as though these women are Norwegian welfare experts. Child allowance is, in a way, much more important than the child.]

In *Se oss*, Aden provides many descriptions of Somali mothers similar to Yasmin’s mother to highlight the pervasiveness of these attitudes. Admittedly, Aden only offers negative depictions of Somali women and she does this as a way of warning her readers of both the prevalence and danger of the Somali cultured mother.

Amal’s Mothers

Amal Aden followed her novel with her third book, a published memoir, *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* [My Dream of Freedom: An Autobiographical Story] published in 2009 (re-printed in 2011). *Min drøm om frihet* follows Aden’s own difficult journey as a tomboy in war-torn Somalia to a confused, orphaned refugee child in Norway, then a drug-addicted, criminal teenager, and, finally, an independent, single mother. Torstein Hvattum’s review in *Aftenposten* asserted that, in this publication, “Amal Aden har skrevet sin historie i en blandingsgenre, midt mellom selvbiografien og romanen” (Hvattum 2009). [Amal Aden has written her story in a blended genre, in between autobiography and novel]. In simple and straightforward prose, Aden attempts to unveil the lifestyles and challenges of the Somali-Norwegian community by sharing her own traumatic experiences.

After years as a street child in war-torn Somalia, Aden, who had become accustomed to the egalitarian and cooperative culture of street children, immigrates to Norway and is incorporated into the Somali-Norwegian community. Two “tykke damer” [fat women], Aden’s

unnamed aunts, serve as the cultured mothers of this memoir since her biological mother was killed in the war (Aden 2009, 14). Her aunts wash her clean of her past and dress her in a hijab, marking a gendered contrast to her life in Somalia. Aden notes this striking divergence, observing that “så ren har jeg aldri vært tidligere” (Aden 2009, 36). [I had never been so clean before]. Aden’s integration into the Somali-Norwegian community is turbulent as Aden, who had never learned the traditional Somali female expectations, is a constant disappointment to her easily angered aunts. “Tante blir rasende når jeg prøver å forklare at jeg trenger hjelp [til å lage mat], hun kaster fra seg de møkkete klærne hun har i hånda og skriker at jeg må lære” (Aden 2009, 37). [Auntie becomes irate when I try to explain that I need help [making food], she throws aside the dirty laundry she has in her hands and screams that I need to learn]. The generational gap is never bridged as “verken tante eller onkel spør hvordan jeg har det, det er ingen som spør om hva jeg har opplevd i Somalia.” (Aden 2009, 37). [Neither auntie or uncle ask how I’m doing, there is no one who asks about what I’ve experienced in Somalia]. A victim of emotional neglect, Aden, still a child, is left to cope with her depression and trauma on her own.

As a child citizen of Norway’s welfare state, Aden is required to check-in with Barneverntjenesten [Child Welfare Services]. “De hvite damene” [the white women] at social services provide little guidance for Aden’s emotional distress but they do provide Aden with the welfare check she is due. When Aden returns home after her visit, the scene is typical. “Det er ikke hyggelig å være der, de sier jeg er gal, en hore, og at jeg er helt ubrukelig. Tante sier at de er tomme for penger, og at barna må ha mat.” (Aden 2009, 45). [It isn’t pleasant to be here, they say I’m crazy, a whore, and that I’m completely useless. Auntie says that they are broke and that their children need to eat]. After having befriended Norwegians and cooperating eagerly with the Norwegian government, Aden is a constant disappointment for having ruined their clan’s honor.

Her aunts, however, are quick to take her welfare money and use it as a contribution to their weekly remittances.

With the help of her clan, Aden finds a husband, Yassin, on a trip back to Somalia. The wedding is rushed, but Aden believes she is happy with her honest and good Muslim husband. Her family arranges for her to be opened, as she is a cut woman, but the woman lives in a country town and can't arrive for two days; despite the tradition of consummating the marriage two days after the wedding, the couple will have to wait for three. Aden is happy to be married but experiences her opening as physically and emotionally traumatic: "Jeg kjenner at jeg stivner til, plutselig er det som jeg kjenner all smerten som rev i kroppen min den dagen jeg ble omskåret. Nå som jeg er gift, må jeg åpnes. Yassin er sur og grinete, han liker ikke at han ikke kan ha sex med kona si før det har gått to dager" (Aden 2009, 124-5). [I notice I'm stiffening, suddenly it's like I feel all the pain that ran through my body that day I was cut. Now that I'm married, I must be opened. Yassin is upset and crabby, he doesn't like that he can't have sex with his wife before the two days have passed]. The pain is unbearable and causes Aden to periodically lose consciousness due to significant blood loss. Aden describes the scene, "Jeg ligger i mitt eget blod på et møkkete teppe og føler meg ufattelig svak. Jeg har mistet masse blod og har store smerter. Jeg er våt av svette. Jeg sover helt utmattet" (Aden 2009, 126). [I lie in my own blood on a dirty rug and feel unbelievably weak. I have lost lots of blood and have lots of pain. I am wet with sweat. I sleep completely exhausted]. Her new Somali mother-in-law, a newly acquired cultured mother, supports the violent tradition, saying "Husk Amal, dette er en smerte som alle gifte kvinner i verden må igjennom" (Aden 2009, 126). [Remember Amal, this is the pain that all married women in the world must endure]. Her mother-in-law depicts this

gendered ritual, the opening of a cut virgin, as an integral step in the process of becoming a cultured mother.

Aden and Yassin's marriage is quickly revealed to be a sham. Yassin uses Aden for her privileged red passport and access to wealth. He constantly attempts to turn her into a proper Somali woman, but fails. In sharp contrast to their Muslim, Somali marriage is the egalitarian Norwegian partnership of Liv and Rune, Aden's Norwegian friends. Aden, despite the fact that she agreed to a Somali marriage and is carrying Yassin's twin babies, continues to spend time with white Norwegians and opts for jeans instead of the expected hijab. Because of these choices the Somali-Norwegian community ostracizes her. Yassin scolds his wife, "Nå som du blir mor, må du dekke deg til. Du må begynne å oppføre deg som en voksen kvinne og gå anstendig kledd. Dessuten må du få deg skikkelige venner, det kan ikke fortsette slik det har vært" (Aden 2009, 181-2). [Now that you'll become a mother, you must cover yourself. You must begin to act like an adult woman and present yourself as decently clothed. Moreover, you need to get some respectable friends, you can't continue this way]. Finally freed from her oppressive aunts, her cultured mothers, Aden finds herself pregnant and expected to become a cultured mother herself to her unborn children. Preferring the egalitarianism of Liv and Rune's relationship, Aden leaves Yassin and her community in order "for å bli alene med barnet" (Aden 2009, 184). [to be alone with the child]. In the final sentence of the book, Aden exclaims, "Mitt liv som gift er over. Mitt liv i frihet begynner" (Aden 2009, 188). [My life as a married woman is over. My life of freedom begins]. Aden concludes her memoir by refusing to perpetuate the role of the cultured mother.

Noreen's Mothers

Nasim Karim's novel *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1996) [IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor, "izzat" is the Urdu word for honor] presents a conflicted relationship with cultured mothers. In 1996, Nasim Karim published her debut novel, *IZZAT*, which is the second diaspora novel to be published in Norway and, as Ingeborg Kongslien explains, "served as counterpart to the first (masculine) narrative," *Pakkis* (Kongslien 2007, 209). The novel follows the difficult journey of Noreen, the narrative's teenage protagonist, as she negotiates her life in Norway with her Pakistani parents. Noreen's life in Norway is originally depicted as harmonious, but her agreeable childhood is quickly disrupted the moment she reaches puberty. Noreen's home life becomes restrictive based on her gender, as she is expected to cover in appropriate Pakistani clothing, do chores, and choose between being Pakistani or Norwegian. Eventually Noreen's stressful familial situation leads her to find control in an eating disorder: "Jeg verken kunne eller ville forandre min kulturelle identitet – men å forandre på vekta var jo enkelt" (Karim 1996, 50). [I could neither could nor would change my cultural identity – but changing my weight was easy]. After multiple visits with a Norwegian psychologist and making a partial recovery, the young daughter socializes with friends at school, particularly an Indian-Norwegian girlfriend, Remo. This transition infuriates Noreen's father as he is used to his little girl following his every direction. Her father becomes violent and Noreen describes his behavior in detail.

"Det førte til at han brukte de frykteligste ord og beskyldninger når han raste mot meg. Det var vondt å høre pappa kalle meg en hore og fortelle meg at jeg hørte hjemme på strøket. En kveld ble han spesielt sint på meg. Han tok av seg beltet og slo meg med det. Hele natten ble jeg sittende oppe og gråte lydløst. Iram [søstera mi] satt våken sammen med meg, gråte og smurte ryggen min. Hun var bare 11 år, og det var ikke lett for henne å se sin søster bli slått. Hun måtte bare stå der og se på, uten å kunne gjøre noe. [...] Hver gang pappa slo meg lukket Iram øynene, mens mamma gråt og ba ham slutte. Det hjalp ikke. Iram pleide å komme og stille seg foran meg for å beskytte meg, men det hjalp heller ikke. Amir [broren min] gjorde lite for å forsvare meg. Han slo meg selv, når det passet ham. Innimellom brukte han en hockey kølle, men det vanligste var karatespark og annet han lærte på kickboksing-treningen. Meg, sin tre år yngre søster, brukte han til å

demonstrere spark og slag på, og jeg sto og tok imot. På en måtte trodde jeg det var slik det skulle være. Jeg hadde aldri hørt noe annet” (Karim 1996, 52).

[It lead to him using the most terrible words and accusations when he criticized me. It hurt to hear papa call me a whore and tell me that I belonged on the street. One night he was especially angry with me. He took off his belt and hit me with it. I spent the whole night sitting up awake soundlessly crying. Iram [my sister] stayed awake with me, cried and rubbed my back. She was only 11 years old, and it wasn't easy for her to see her sister beaten. She had to just stand there and watch, without being able to do anything. [...] Every time papa beat me, Iram closed her eyes, while mamma cried and asked him to stop. It didn't help. Iram would usually come and stand in front of me to protect me, but that didn't work either. Amir [my bother] did little to defend me. He also hit me when it suited him. Every once in a while he used a hockey stick, but the worst was his karate kicks and other moves he learned at kickboxing practice. He used to practice his kicks and punches on his three-years younger sister and me, and I stood there and took it. In a way I thought this is the way it was supposed to be. I had never heard of anything different.]

Lisbeth, the psychologist, eventually notices the abuse and removes Noreen from her home and places her in a barnehem [children's home]. In the barnehem, Noreen (problematically) rationalizes her domestic problems as cultural differences: “Vi har ulike verdier og interesser, og det er dette som utgjør kulturforskjellen mellom oss. Og det var den som splittet oss – akkurat som jeg er splittet mellom to kulturer, to sett av normer og verdier. Jeg er litt pakistansk, men mest norsk” (Karim 1996, 52). [We have different values and interests, and that is what constitutes the cultural difference between us. And it is that which split us apart – precisely as I'm split between two cultures, two sets of norms and values. I'm a little Pakistani, but mostly Norwegian]. While in the barnehem, Noreen sinks into a deep depression and attempts to commit suicide. Noreen is eventually released from the barnehem and into her parents' custody.

The family, in an attempt to fix Noreen, flies her to Pakistan where they have coordinated an arranged marriage – the narrative implies this to be common procedure in the Pakistani community in Norway. Noreen begs her father to reconsider, “Abbo, jeg vil ikke gifte meg. Vær så snill, la meg studere, ikke press meg” (Karim 1996, 104). [*Abbo* [Father], I don't want to get

married. Please, let me study, don't pressure me]. Noreen never veers from her Muslim faith, despite the fact that her father and uncles are using it in opposition to her wellbeing. In fact, Noreen invokes her right to *ijtihad* – “independent reasoning,” or her right to individually interpret the Koran – and debates the religious dogma used to oppress her. Failing to convince the men in her family, Noreen writes a plea for help, a letter to her sister, before attempting suicide for the second time after she comes to the conclusion that “Døtre er en vare man kan gi bort eller selge, men sønner er noe verdifullt som forblir i familien” (Karim 1996, 120). [Daughters are an item one can give away or sell, but sons are valuable and remain in the family]. Noreen's arranged marriage with Hussain is flat and she quickly realizes the family only eagerly accepted the union because “En kone til sønnen vår kunne vi ha fått fra mange, men gjennom [Noreen] får vi visum til Norge” (Karim 1996, 122). [A wife for our son we could have gotten from many, but through Noreen we got a visa to Norway]. Faking an extra long and painful menstruation, Noreen ducks her marital duties and is able to escape Pakistan with the financial help of her girlfriends at a hair parlor because, “det er Norge som er mitt hjemland” (Karim 1996, 135) [It is Norway that is my homeland]. There is a small period of familial reconciliation in Norway; however, the novel ultimately depicts the championing of a heroic, female individual.

IZZAT's first-person narrator places sole blame on Noreen's father as the perpetrator of domestic violence: “Det mennesket som såret meg slik, og, bevisst eller ikke, prøvde å ødelegge fremtiden min, er ingen andre enn min egen far” (Karim 1996, 6) [The person who hurt me, and, knowingly or unknowingly, tried to sabotage my future, is none other than my own father]. However, the trope of the cultured mother and her mother's bystander status recur throughout the narrative, which suggests that the parents share the blame. Noreen's mother's life, that of the

cultured Pakistani (or Iranian, Turkish, Moroccan, and Indian) mother, is Noreen's worst nightmare and offers the central negative moral of the story (Karim 1996, 9). Noreen depicts becoming a cultured mother as her dystopian destiny: "jenter som kunne hatt en fremtid husmødre og 'fødemaskiner,' uten utdannelse, jobb eller muligheter. De blir fanger i sine egne hjem" (Karim 1996, 9). [women who could have had a future became housewives and 'birthing machines,' without an education, job, or opportunity]. The cultured mother, as depicted in Karim's novel, is a product of prioritizing male *izzat* [honor] over female worth, but it is not an immigrant woman's inevitable fate.³⁵ Noreen explains, "men jeg valgte en vei der det ikke kunne bli annerledes – jeg ba om retten til å skape min egen fremtid" (Karim 1996, 141). [But I chose a path where it could be different – I asked for the right to create my own future]. The novel should be read with attention to the fact that Noreen's mother provides a lived example of the worst-case scenario.

While the above evidence suggests that solely males in the Pakistani-Norwegian community perpetrate domestic violence upon females, I would like to offer a reading that complicates this by highlighting the involvement of the cultured mother in this violent narrative. Karim writes examples of female camaraderie into the narrative (between the sisters, Noreen and Remo, and the hair parlor scene), however the presence of her (nameless) mother as a hindrance to Noreen's freedom is pervasive. Noreen's mother is described simultaneously as a product and as a passive enforcer of the patriarchy. Traditional gendered roles are enforced in the family's home. "Hjemme hadde både jeg og mamma nok å gjøre. [...] Mens mamma var hjemme med oss, jobbet pappa som regnskapsansvarlig i en mellomstor bedrift. Han tjente godt nok til å

³⁵ "Hvorfor kan de ikke like godt si det rett ut: 'Vi er nødt til å ødelegge din fremtid. Du betyr mindre for oss enn vår ære'" (Karim 1996, 9) [Why can't they just as well say it right out: "We are forced to destroy your future. You mean less to us than does our honor."]

forsørge oss alle” (Karim 1996, 21). [At home, mamma and I had enough to do [...]] While mamma was home with us, papa worked as the chief accountant in a medium-sized company. He earned enough money to support all of us]. Following the traditional breadwinner model, women in Noreen’s family have ultimate responsibility for the domestic sphere. In her mother’s absence, Noreen, the next eldest female, is required to assume all domestic duties.

Cyclical migration, the changing of location, is frequent in the narrative as the novel depicts the realities of modern migration. The family travels back-and-forth, to and from Norway to Pakistan. The novel describes how gendered roles are negotiated in a culture of cyclical migration.

”Etter at mamma hadde reist ble husarbeidet min oppgave. Jeg hadde lekser, gikk på turer, laget mat og gjorde alt som skulle gjøres i huset. Det var ikke bare lett for meg, som bare gikk i tredje klasse, men jeg gjorde så godt jeg kunne. Ofte lurte jeg på om en norsk jente på min alder ville gjort det samme, men jeg forsto at siden jeg var pakistansk, var det forskjell på meg og norske jenter. Men av og til ble jeg lei av alt arbeidet” (Karim 1996, 23).

[After mamma left, all of the housework became my responsibility. I had homework, went on walks, made food, and did everything else around the house. It wasn’t easy for me, who was only in third grade, but I did the best I could. I often wondered if a Norwegian girl of my age would have done the same, but I understood that since I was Pakistani, there was a difference between Norwegian girls and me. But sometimes I got a little sick of all of the work].

The cultured mother burdens her daughter with her absence and the weight of gendered labor expectations, forcing upon her age-inappropriate tasks that hinder intellectual development and childhood curiosity typical of Norwegian society. Cyclical migration burdens the second-generation daughter in the host country, but also allows for the cultured mother’s own intimate and recurrent connection to the home country. “Authentic” artifacts and symbols of the home ethnicity are easily accessible as they are only a plane ride and a suitcase away.

”Endelig kom dagen vi hadde ventet på. Vi gjorde alt klart hjemme før vi reiste til flyplassen og hentet dem [mamma og lillesøster], og gjensynsgleden var stor. Mamma

hadde med seg Pakistans nasjonaldrakt, salvar kamiz, til meg og Amir. 'Salvar kamiz,' tenkte jeg. 'Skal jeg gå med det? Skal jeg gå med skjorte som rekker til knærne og posebukse? Det har jeg aldri hatt før.' Jeg var veldig spent, og til slutt fant mamma frem klærne og ga meg dem så jeg kunne prøve. Etter at jeg hadde fått på meg klærne løp jeg for å speile meg" (Karim 1996, 23).

[Finally the day I'd been waiting for came. We tidied the house before we went to the airport to pick them [mama and little sister] up, it was a greatly anticipated reunion. Mamma brought back the Pakistani national costume, salwar kameez, for me and Amir. "Salwar kameez," I thought. "Am I to wear this? Am I to walk around in a shirt that reaches my knees and baggy pants? I've never had this before." I was really excited, and finally mamma dug out the clothes and gave them to me so that I could try them on. After I put on the clothes I ran to the mirror to see myself.]

Noreen is encouraged and enabled by her mother to trade in her jeans, the symbol of Western (gender neutral) apparel, for a salwaar kameez, a traditional Pakistani garment. Clothing, as is detailed multiple times in the novel, not only serves as a connection to the home country but, more significantly and in gendered contrast to her brother's experience, Noreen's appropriate ethnic apparel is integral to upholding the family's honor.

Isolation in an insular community is a gendered experience in this novel, a trait of cultured mothers. Cultural isolation is most evident in Noreen's mother's unwillingness to acquire Norwegian as a second language, shown in stark contrast to her husband and children's Norwegian fluency.

"Hjemme snakket vi for det meste urdu, men det hendte at vi søsknene snakket norsk sammen. Vi snakket urdu mest av hensyn til mamma. Hun var ikke så sterk i norsk. Stort sett forsto hun hva vi sa, og hun kunne snakke norsk også, men det var ganske gebrokkent. Jeg skjønnte ikke helt hvorfor hun ikke hadde greid å lære seg skikkelig norsk etter å ha bodd 15 år i Norge. Pappa hadde vært her fem år lenger, og snakket godt norsk. Grunnen var kanskje at pappa snakket norsk hele dagen på jobben, mens mamma var hjemme og ikke hadde noen å snakke norsk med" (Karim 1996, 27-8).

[At home we mostly spoke Urdu, but it happened that we siblings spoke Norwegian together. We spoke Urdu mostly in consideration of mamma. She wasn't a strong Norwegian speaker. She understood for the most part what we said, and she could speak some Norwegian also, but it was pretty broken. I didn't totally understand why she didn't bother to learn proper Norwegian after having lived 15 years in Norway. Papa had been here five years longer and spoke good Norwegian. The reason was maybe because papa

spoke Norwegian the whole day at work, while mamma was at home and didn't have anyone to speak Norwegian with.]

In this passage, *IZZAT*'s narrator flips Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous post-colonial question "Can the subaltern speak?" to "Does the subaltern even care to speak?" (Spivak 1999). The cultured mother's agency is called into question as she hasn't "*greid*" or managed to learn the language the rest of her family seems to have effortlessly acquired. Her confinement in the domestic sphere limits her abilities to communicate; however the fact that she agrees to her own isolation or confinement suggest that the cultured mother doesn't desire a voice in the host country.

Yet although Noreen's mother does manifest some desires, protecting her daughter from abuse is rarely one of them. She takes some action, for example requesting that her husband stop beating her children and crying while her children are being physically abused, but, in the end, she defers to his judgment and stands by his side. Additionally, and what is further emphasized in the novel, is Noreen's mother's bystander status during Noreen's self-inflicted harm, her suicide attempts. Noreen's cultured mother does not intervene or assist in her daughter's recovery – instead she passively observes, taking no action. Her absence is highlighted after Noreen's first suicide attempt when Noreen is alone in a hospital bed.

"Mens jeg kjenner varmen bre seg i kroppen snakker jeg til mamma som om hun var der. 'Mamma, savner du meg ikke? Hvorfor ber du ikke pappa komme og hente meg? Jeg har det så vondt, mamma. Jeg trenger deg, jeg vil ikke ha det sånn.' Jeg føler meg dopet og langt borte. Jeg kan svakt høre at noen banker på døra og ber meg lukke opp, men jeg føler at jeg glir bort. Jeg har ikke krefter til å gå bort og åpne døra. Jeg vil sove..." (Karim 1996, 86).

[As I feel the warmth spread in my body, I speak with mamma as though she was there. 'Mamma, do you miss me? Why don't you ask papa to come and get me? I'm not doing well, mamma. I need you, I don't want it to be like this.' I feel drugged and far away. I can faintly hear that someone is knocking on the door asking me to open up, but I feel like I'm slipping away. I don't have the strength to go over and open the door. I want to sleep...]

While under anesthesia, Noreen appropriates a Western notion of the caring mother, which contrasts with the self-evident failings of the cultured mother. Her mother's absence is heart wrenching to *IZZAT*'s Norwegian audience who would have a differing view of a mother's duties, namely that her unconditional love for her children would naturally trump any notion of honor.

In spite of Noreen's strained relationship to her mother throughout the novel, the novel's dénouement offers a perplexing mother/daughter reconciliation.

"Mamma ringer meg på Krisesenteret og ber meg komme hjem. Etter mye om og men bestemmer jeg meg for å dra hjem på besøk, for mammas skyld. [...] Hele familien er der når jeg kommer. Mamma åpner døra, kysser meg mange ganger, klemmer meg og gråter. Jeg prøver å forstå hvordan hun må ha det. Hun har ikke gjort noe som helst, og likevel går alt dette ut over henne. Hun får ikke lov til å ha kontakt med datteren sin. Jeg lever, og det vet hun, men jeg er erklært død. Det kan ikke være lett for henne. Hun er splittet mellom meg, sin datter, og pappa, sin mann. Hvis side skal hun ta – hvem har rett og hvem tar feil? Hun trenger jo oss begge" (Karim 1996, 137).

[Mamma calls me at the Crisis Center and asks me to come home. After a lot of back and forth, I decide to go home for a visit, for mamma's sake. ... The whole family is there when I visit. Mamma opens the door, kisses me many times, hugs me, and cries. I try to understand how she must be feeling. She hasn't done anything at all, and, nonetheless she's subjected to all of this. She isn't allowed to have contact with her daughter. I am alive, that she knows, but I'm declared dead. It can't be easy for her. She is split between me, her daughter, and papa, her husband. Which side should she take – who is right and who is wrong? She needs us both.]

In this passage Noreen forgives her mother because she understands that her mother was trapped between a rock and a hard place, her daughter's needs and her husband's demands. What's perplexing is the way in which *IZZAT*'s narrator situates the cultured mother in the dénouement. Noreen's mother completely lacks agency, she's unable to act, help, or support her daughter. She "trenger" [needs] both husband and daughter, as she has no identity outside of her relationship to her family members; to her daughter she is a mother and to her husband, a wife, and with one

member's absence she experiences an identity void. This passage strengthens the trope of the cultured mother because it demonstrates the extent to which this woman is caged by her culture. It is ironic that Noreen's life project (and the take-home message of this novel) is to prove that she, as a Pakistani-Norwegian woman, has agency and that she is an individual capable of driving her own destiny. However, the way she absolves her mother of fault parallels patriarchal thought and strips her of the responsibility for her own emotions and control of her own actions.

Sara's Mothers

Mina Bai's *Skam* (2014) [Shame] provides an example of how a cultured mother can influence the protagonist in Norway even when the cultured mother is still in the home country, in this case Iran. *Skam* is a novel informed by Bai's own migration and integration experiences. The novel follows Sara Heydar Padeshahi's solitary journey from Iran to Oslo, Norway as well as her lonely Norwegian integration process. The novel is narrated in first person by the protagonist Sara. Born in Tehran, Iran and orphaned at an early age, Sara was adopted in her infancy by a woman called Nanna and becomes a beloved member of Nanna's small Iranian family. The family encounters trouble in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, since Onkel [Uncle], Nanna's husband, is a known communist activist. The oppressive religious politics of Tehran worsen and Onkel mysteriously disappears, which leads Nanna to insist that Sara flee Iran and seek asylum in Norway. Nanna arranges and pays for smugglers to transport Sara to Norway. Sara, residing alone in Norway, learns Norwegian, obtains a Norwegian passport, receives an

education, and works as a hjelpepleier [nursing assistant]³⁶ at an elder home where her mission is to earn enough money to bring Nanna to Norway via a family reunification visa.

The novel's main focus is on Sara's conflicted sexual awakening, where Sara's personal struggle simultaneously serves as a discussion of Iranian (Eastern and Muslim) versus Norwegian (Western and secular) notions of sex and sexuality. Sara observes the cultural differences in what is intended to be a humorous passage for the novel's Norwegian audience:

”For ingen steder i verden er man så seksfikserte som i Midtøsten. Vi hadde tross alt ikke hatt tilgang til det motsatte kjønn fra barnehagen av, slik som her i Norge. En gang hadde Nanna fortalt meg at dydige jenter måtte kjøpe auberginer, agurker og bananer med en alvorlig, respektfull mine, for de symboliserte menns edle deler. Og en prektig jente måtte for all del ikke plukke ut meloner med et smil om munnen, for da minnet hun mannfolkene om hennes egne kvinnelige attributter” (Bai 2014, 7).

[For nowhere in the world are people so fixated on sex as in the Middle East. We had, after all, no access to the opposite sex from preschool on; like they do here in Norway. One time Nanna explained to me that virtuous girls had to buy eggplants, cucumbers, and bananas with a serious, respectful expression, because they symbolized men's noble bits. And a noble girl must not for any reason pick out melons with a smile on her face, because she would remind men about her own feminine attributes.]

This quote introduces what comes to be the abstract role Nanna plays as the (absent) cultured mother in *Skam*'s diasporic setting. Nanna is described as an open-minded and a mildly rebellious Iranian woman. “Hun var mer frisinnet enn de fleste andre mødrene jeg kjente og hadde til og med tatt meg med på kino for å se Star Wars, selv om hun visste at onkel ikke likte det” (Bai 2014, 12). [She was more spirited than most of the other mothers that I knew and had even taken me to the cinema to see Star Wars, even though she knew that uncle didn't approve]. However, Nanna is simultaneously described as a product and dutiful follower of her religion

³⁶ Hjelpepleier is similar to the American CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) or NA (Nursing Assistant).

and culture. ”Men likevel rant tradisjoner og kultur i blodet vårt” (Bai 2014, 12-3). [But, nonetheless, traditions and culture ran through our blood].

Nanna is deeply religious, a Sufi Muslim, and is inevitably influenced (or, in Sara’s words, *hjernevask* [brainwashed]) by the cultural codes imposed by the Islamic Revolution (Bai 2014, 13). Despite previously having allowed her daughter to view Hollywood films, Nanna in her later years is skeptical and fearful of Western influence, particularly Western music. ”Nanna mumlet og ba til Gud, mens Gholi skar en grimase og sa det var bedre å få en M6 mot hodet enn å høre på den pipete musedamen (Madonna)” (Bai 2014, 103; parenthesis in the original). [Nanna mumbled and prayed to God, while Gholi grimaced and said that it was better to have a M6 to the head than to listen to that squeaky mouse lady (Madonna)]. Nanna and Gholi (Sara’s adopted sister) respond to the sensuality of *musedamen*³⁷ Madonna with prayers and disgust. A stricter example of Nanna’s confinement in her culture is during a letter exchange between the mother/daughter pair. Sara, in an attempt to provoke empathy from her mother about her difficult liminal situation in Norwegian society, describes her conflicted state and encloses cassette tapes with song lyrics she believes will assist in her explanation of her thoughts and feelings as an immigrant in Norway. Nanna responds unsympathetically and warns her confused daughter, “Vestlig musikk er forbudt. Husker du ikke?” (Bai 2014, 67). [Western music is forbidden. Don’t you remember?] It is not only Nanna’s personal opinions that cause problem for Sara, but also the reality of the political situation in which Nanna resides.

As Sara and Nanna are in different locations throughout most of the novel, Nanna’s role as the cultured mother becomes more abstract. Sara conflates Nanna’s maternalism with what

³⁷ *Musedamen* = “mouse woman” has a dual meaning. *Mus* (mouse) is a Norwegian slang term roughly equivalent to “pussy,” calling someone a *mus* is a way of calling a woman a “slut.” *Mus* serves also to criticize the nasality of Madonna’s voice.

Sara terms “den religiøse stemmen” [the religious voice]. Sara explains that, “Den religiøse stemmen jeg hadde i hodet, fortalte meg alltid at sex var skittent. ... En god grunn til ikke å ha sex var trusselen om at Gud straffet synd, og at sykdom var straffen” (Bai 2014, 26). [The religious voice I had in my head told me that sex was always dirty... A good reason not to have sex was the threat that God punished sins, and that illness was the punishment]. “Den religiøse stemmen” is Sara’s inherited guilt and shame concerning Eastern notions of sexual mores. Sara is plagued by these childhood lessons from her cultured mother.

”Der jeg sto fortvilet foran speilet og festet et hårbånd rundet hodet for å skjule hva jeg hadde gjort, kom jeg på noe Nanna en gang sa til meg. ’Du kan aldri ta bort flekkene til en giraff eller stripene til en sebra.’ Det var så tydelig. Jeg så det nå. Jeg var en giraff. Jeg var en sebra. Ingen hårbleking ville forandre på det og gjøre meg til en lyshåret løveunge. Jeg var annerledes” (Bai 2014, 48).

[As I stood there in despair in front of the mirror and put a headband on my head to hide what I’d done, I thought of something Nanna once said to me. “You can never take away the spots of a giraffe or the stripes of a zebra.” It was so clear. I saw it now. I was the giraffe. I was the zebra. No hair dye would change that and make me a fair-haired lion. I was different.]

In an interview in *Dagsavisen*, Bai addresses the role the cultured mother plays in upholding what she views as problematic cultural patterns, “Man hører mye om patriarkatet, men kvinnene selv har mye skyld. Mødrene oppdrar sine døtre i en ond sirkel vi ikke kommer ut av” (Pedersen 2014). [One hears a lot about the patriarchy, but women also bear much of the guilt. Mothers raise their daughters in a vicious circle that we can never escape]. “Den religiøse stemmen” and Nanna’s childhood lessons further what Sara experiences as an irreconcilably dichotomous life, one which pulls her between Norwegian sexual promiscuity and crushing Iranian guilt. “Én ting var klart. Jeg var annerledes enn de skandinaviske jentene uansett hvor mye jeg prøvde å vise at jeg var moderne og fri. Jeg bar et tusen år gammelt kulturelt lass på skuldrene mine” (Bai 2014, 48). [One thing was clear. I was different than the Scandinavian girls no matter how much I tried

to show that I was modern and free. I carried a thousand-year-old cultural burden on my shoulders]. To put her situation bluntly, Sara is equally as horny, lustful, and sexually curious as her Nordic counterparts, but the religious guilt inherited from her cultured mother restricts her from her desired sexual liberation.

Sara discloses horrific memories from childhood to illustrate the severity of “den religiøse stemmen” and the cultural expectations for women’s sexuality associated with it.

”Jeg visste at hvis jeg lå med en mann utenfor ekteskapet og det senere viste seg at det ikke ble noe mer mellom oss, ville ingen lenger ha meg. Såpass hadde jeg lært. Søsteren til bestevenninnen min ble voldtatt av fetteren sin og ble tvunget til å gifte seg med ham etterpå. Jeg fikk høre at det var lettere å gifte seg med denne forbryteren enn å bære skammen av å være tilsølt” (Bai 2014, 27).

[I knew that if I slept with a man outside of marriage and it later turned out that there was nothing more between us, no one would ever want me. That much I had learned. My best friend’s sister was raped by her cousin and was forced to marry him afterwards. I heard that it was easier to marry your abuser than to bear the shame of being soiled.]

According to Sara’s recollections from her childhood, a woman’s honor lies in her sexual purity and must therefore be protected at all costs. As rape and sexual activity against a woman’s will is no exception to this rule, Sara struggles with her own decision to be sexually active and, even worse, the knowledge that she really enjoys her sexual exploits. Sara loses her virginity to Ahmed, a fellow Iranian refugee, and oscillates between celibacy and sexual activity throughout the novel. Sara’s guilty conscious regarding her sexuality manifests itself in an all too literal and explicit scene in chapter 56: “Enden er nær” [The End is Near]. While performing oral sex on Sondre (Sara’s boyfriend from work, who she had been keeping secret from Nanna), Sara contemplates the religious and philosophic consequences of her sexual promiscuity. So deep in thought and conflicted with guilt, Sara literally chokes on her sins and bites her accomplice. So engrossed is Sara that she doesn’t realize her situation until Sondre shakes her off in pain and wakes her from her distracted thoughts (Bai 2014, 213).

Sara, in her displaced confusion, further conflates “den religiøse stemmen” and the role of the cultured mother with influences from other Muslim migrants in Norway. Kako, Sara’s friend from Norskkurs [Norwegian language and culture classes] and roommate, as well as Golum, a Turkish coworker, are both older than Sara and serve as surrogate Muslim cultured mothers for her in Oslo. Kako, a fellow Iranian refugee, is described as a good cook and uncompromisingly religious. The women’s relationship is problematic as, for a time, they are each other’s only companions, but they espouse to opposing attitudes towards integration – Kako refuses to adapt to her new life in Norway whereas Sara is eager to experience her newfound Western freedom. Sara’s guilt complex is worsened by her relationship with Kako. “Noen ganger preket Kako så mye om moral og Gud og helvete at jeg tenkte at hvis den religiøse stemmen i hodet mitt hadde hatt en skikkelse, så ville den sikkert sett ut som Kako” (Bai 2014, 57).

[Sometimes Kako preached so much about morals and God and hell that I thought if the religious voice in my head had a shape, then it would certainly have looked like Kako.] Kako is Sara’s religious nag and bully. “Kako hadde sagt at uansett hvor mye øl jeg drakk eller hvor mange jeg ’knullet’ (hun måtte absolutt bruke dette vulgære ordet), ville jeg aldri bli helt norsk” (Bai 2014, 151). [Kako had said that no matter how many beers I drank or how many men I “fucked” (she absolutely had to use that vulgar word), I would never be completely Norwegian]. Despite her own shameful secret past, Kako holds her piousness over Sara’s head and teams up with like-minded Muslim women in Norway to shame Sara when caught engaging in acts that violate Muslim behavioral or religious norms. One example of this shaming is “salamikrisen” [the salami crisis] (Bai 2014, 142). At a work birthday celebration, open-faced sandwiches are served with a variety of deli meats. Sara, partial to the flavor, eats salami slices. Kako and Golum, unable to control their dissent, publically scold Sara for violating halal dietary restrictions. Sara

fight against their religious judgment but embarrasses herself in front of her Norwegian colleagues in the process.

The combination of cultured mothers creates a type of snowball effect, making Sara's moral, sexual, and cultural anxiety inescapable. "Jeg sitter i mitt eget fengsel, så mye kontroll og autoritet fra barndommen, så mye hjernevasking har tatt fra meg evnen til å håndtere mine egne valg og konsekvensene av mine handlinger. Jeg har meldt meg ut av min religion og min kultur" (Bai 2014, 80). [I'm sitting in my own jail, so much control and authority from childhood, so much brainwashing had taken my ability to manage my own choices and the consequences of my actions. I've renounced my religion and my culture]. Although Bai is one of very few writers to explicitly address Muslim women's sexuality in Norway, she depicts a variant on a concept common to Norwegian diaspora literature. Sara's conflict is representative of Gustavo Pérez Firmat's "1.5 generation" where, as Ingeborg Kongslien explains, "these individuals have to cope with two different transitions simultaneously, 'two crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions,' changing homelands and moving from childhood/youth into adulthood" (Kongslien 2007, 211). At the hands of her various cultured mothers, Sara is constantly pulled between Norway and Iran as well as her childhood and adulthood.

Throughout the novel Sara balances a love for her mother with a hatred of her mother's culture. For example, Sara explains that "jeg sa aldri noe om ting jeg visste ville såre henne. Det at jeg hadde gått på diskotek eller at jeg hadde mistet jomfrudommen, ville knust hjertet hennes" (Bai 2014, 64). [I never said anything about things I knew would hurt her. That I'd gone to the disco or had lost my virginity, that would have broken her heart]. And yet, at the same time, Sara wonders "hvordan det måtte føles å befri seg fra all den skammen?" (Bai 2014, 199). [what it must feel like to be free from all of this shame?]. The novel's ending allows for an arguably

unrealistic resolution. At the end of the novel, Sara encounters an empathetic immigration officer who fast tracks Nanna's visitor's visa. Nanna, in poor health, travels to Norway and is uncharacteristically accepting of her daughter's new home. Sara is shocked when Nanna reveals that she knew Sara's biological mother and even more stunned when Nanna divulges her understanding attitude towards deviant sexual behavior. Nanna saved Sara from a life of poverty because she respected Sara's biological mother's risky dedication to her maternal duties despite the likely possibility of losing her honor. Nanna explains that "ikke mange ville gjort det. De ville forsøkt å kvitte seg med barnet på en annen måte for ikke å bringe skam over familien sin. Husk alltid på hvor modig hun var" (Bai 2014, 257). [...not many would have done that. They would have tried to get rid of the child in another way so that they didn't bring shame to their family. Remember always how brave she was]. Shortly after this revelation Nanna dies in her sleep. Sara is never able to confront her mother about her past sexual transgressions or her current relationship with Sondre, the Norwegian love of her life.

Despite the protagonist's depression, the death of the cultured mother is, oddly enough, the key to the novel's happy ending. Bai yields to this observation stating, "Det var til å begynne med ikke meningen, men etter hvert ble det mer en feelgood-roman. For eksempel endret jeg slutten. Ellers ville det blitt for mørkt og trist. Jeg ville ikke at innvandrerdøtre skulle lese dette og til slutt tenke: 'Jeg gir opp.' Jeg ville være positiv" (Pedersen 2014). [It wasn't initially the intention, but eventually it became more of a feel-good novel. For example, I changed the ending. Otherwise it would have been too dark and drab. I didn't want immigrant girls to read this and at the end think: "I give up." I wanted to be positive]. Fulfilling her final duties as a Muslim daughter, Sara buries her mother in compliance with Muslim burial rituals. Ultimately,

her mother's death allows Sara to untether herself from the expectations of the cultured mother and to replace "den religiøse stemmen" with her own voice (Bai 2014, 290).

Zara's Mothers

Roda Ahmed's *Forberedelsen* (2008) [The Preparation] shows diversity in this second trope by presenting two cultured mothers, her mother and her grandmother, and arranging them in a hierarchical structure, or a hierarchy of authority. *Forberedelsen* is a fictional work based on the author's lived experiences. The novel is a coming of age story about Zara, a second-generation Somali-Norwegian girl. The central theme of the novel is Western (the right to choose, the right to experiment) versus Eastern (abstinence until a marriage is arranged by your parents/family) conceptions of love and marriage. It follows Zara's progression through public school, her relationship with her family, and her scandalous secret dating life. Zara dates three different men in the novel, having a significant relationship with the third, an older Norwegian architect named Edvard. Norway's Samuel Huntington-style clash of civilizations is shown in Zara and Edvard's relationship (Huntington 1993). Zara hides her romantic life from her parents because, "Det ville i tilfelle medføre dødsstraff. Eller hvis man var heldig, en forvisning til ørkenen uten mat og drikke" (Ahmed 2008, 92). [It would in some cases incur the death penalty. Or, if she was lucky, banishment to the desert without food or drink]. Whereas Edvard, "[hennes] vakre sjømann" [her beautiful sailor], sees her as though she "var som alle andre norske jenter, som kunne gjøre som de ville uten at det fikk noen konsekvenser" (Ahmed 2008, 93). [was like all of the other Norwegian girls who could do as they wished without consequences].³⁸ As

³⁸ Zara's perception of Norwegian women needs problematizing because it isn't entirely true that Norwegian women face no consequences. Though Norwegian women may not be socially

exhibited through Ahmed's water metaphor that flows through the novel, there is little room for liminality: Somalis, people of the desert, cannot swim and avoid the water, whereas Norwegians are great fisherman and people of the sea. Somalis and Norwegians are diametrically opposed, different people from different geographies and therefore different lifestyles. When Zara's mother discovers the affair, "fikk hun husarrest" (Ahmed 2008, 161). [she was put under house arrest]. The family flies to London for Ayeyyo's (Somali for "grandmother") funeral but also, fearing Zara will destroy their honor, to arrange a surprise wedding for Zara. Zara refuses this fate and secretly buys a plane ticket to Paris, a vacation destination Edvard and she had previously discussed. The novel ends as a cliffhanger: Does Zara reunite with Edvard? Does she ever see her family again? Is she safe from an honor killing in Paris?

Forberedelsen features two contrasting cultured mothers: Zara's maternal grandmother, Ayeyyo, and Zara's mother ("mor" [mother], nameless). Although both are variants of the cultured mother trope, Ahmed places these mothers in a hierarchy – her grandmother on the top (good) and her mother on the bottom (bad). My analysis of *Forberedelsen* will focus on the competing portrayals of the cultured mother and how this trope is used to simultaneously oppress and uplift the second-generation protagonist.

Zara's grandmother resides in London, England and is an activist within her multicultural neighborhood. Ayeyyo embraces her sense of cultural duty by volunteering her time, shopping at immigrant grocery stores instead of British stores, observing halal dietary laws, and, most significantly, secretly wiring money to family in Somalia. Sending remittances to Somalia, or any moving of dollars, is considered a man's role in the diasporic London community, so Ayeyyo's willingness to financially assist her countrymen for over twenty years is seen as an

ostracized for being sexually active, but there can still be social, physical, medical, and psychological consequences.

admirably subversive act. Ayeyyo brings Zara along to a drop-off and explains to her that it's "vår lille hemmelighet" [our little secret], giving Zara the role of accomplice in Ayeyyo's feminist activism. Muslim feminist activism is integral to Ayeyyo's identity (Ahmed 2008, 47). Zara's grandmother finds Western culture fundamentally oppressive to Muslim women's wellbeing and self-worth. Ayeyyo requests that Zara not read fashion magazines, as they're symbolic of Western notions of femininity. She tells her granddaughter,

"Ikke begynn å lese moteblader, jenta mi. Her i Vesten har de blader som forteller deg hva slags kropp, klær og karriere du bør ha. Men du er voksen nok til å gjøre hva du vil, ingen kan bestemme over deg. Jeg hadde aldri trodd at jeg kom til å bo i et ikke-muslimsk land og oppdra mine barnebarn der, med halvnakne mennesker rundt om i gatene og på tv hele døgnet. Jeg klarer meg helt fint, det er ikke det jeg sier. Det er bare viktig å huske på hvor man kommer fra, hvor man har røttene sine" (Ahmed 2008, 106).

[Don't start reading fashion magazines, my dear. Here in the West they have magazines that tell you what type of body, clothes, or career you should to have. But you are adult enough to do what you want, no one can decide for you. I would have never imagined that I was going to live in a non-Muslim country and raise my grandchildren there, with half naked people around the streets and on TV all day. I get by just fine, that's not what I'm saying. It's just important to remember where one comes from, where one has their roots.]

This life lesson complicates the motives of the cultured mother. Certainly, Ayeyyo is pulling her second-generation granddaughter away from her host culture and using a Muslim lens to interpret self-worth, but this approach does give her granddaughter options, albeit options motivated by non-Western religious reasoning.

Ayeyyo, committed to preserving the family's Muslim roots in their new Western host countries (both Norway and England), asks of Zara to agree to a marriage arranged by her parents and grandmother. Ayeyyo literally has a binder full of available men, which she and Zara peruse. Zara thinks she is too young to consider marriage, but Ayeyyo pleads that "hun gjerne ville se meg gift før hennes tid på jorden var over" (Ahmed 2008, 129). [she really wanted to see me get married before her time on earth was over]. Zara is encouraged to choose her future

husband from a binder of pre-vetted potential partners because “ingen kjenner kjærligheten når man er ung, Zara. Det er de valgene man gjør som ung, man må leve med når man blir gammel. Derfor er det best å la noen eldre velge for deg. Det gjør du klokt i” (Ahmed 2008, 130). [no one knows love when they’re young, Zara. It’s the choices one makes in one’s youth that they must live with when they’re old. Therefore, it’s best to let someone older choose for you. That would be wise of you]. Ayeyyo thoughtfully enforces her cultural tradition and provides reasoning as to why her granddaughter must oblige. This realization is tragic as Zara is still in love with Edvard. Because of her grandmother’s strong cultural opinions, Zara is conflicted as a woman she deeply respects pulls her between Western and Eastern cultural traditions and customs.

Ayeyyo’s feminine, cultured strength is contrasted with Zara’s mother’s feminine, cultured weakness. Where Ayeyyo complicates the West/East divide, Zara’s mother, the epitome of the cultured mother, is trapped in the obligations of both her home and host cultures. Ayeyyo sees exceptionalism in her granddaughter that she doesn’t see in her daughter, Zara’s mother. Ayeyyo states, “Du kommer til å bli enda vakrere enn din mor” (Ahmed 2008, 40) [You’re going to be even more beautiful than your mother] and prophesies that, “Du er for ung til å være det ennå, men jeg tror nok du er modigere enn de andre jentene i familien” (Ahmed 2008, 42) [You’re too young to be yet, but I’d bet that you are braver than the other women in the family]. These statements add to an already strained mother/daughter relationship and legitimize Zara’s harsh critique of her cultured mother. Early in the narrative, Zara’s mother is characterized, by both appearance and domestic ability, as an archetype of the cultured mother in that she covers, always wearing a hijab, and takes pride in her reputation as a stellar cook. She’s described as particularly diasporically cultured, as she has made a new home in Norway for which she’s thankful, but she is careful not to fully assimilate. “Mor og far elsket å være i Norge; de snakket

sjelden om Somalia som var i full borgerkrig. Norge var vårt land. Landet med alle mulighetene, som hadde alle utdannelsen og som huset deres barn og barnebarn. Mor svarte konsekvent på engelsk hvis hun ble spurt om noe av nordmenn” (Ahmed 2008, 20) [Mom and Dad loved to be in Norway; they rarely spoke of Somalia which was in full civil war. Norway was our country. The country with all the opportunity, with all of the education, and that housed their children and grandchildren. Mom answered consistently in English if she was asked something of Norwegians]. In this description of her parents, Zara uses language acquisition to question the legitimacy of her mother’s Norwegian patriotism. Despite their love for their host country, the language issue is used as a way to enforce Somali values in Norway. “Når Silje,” [When Silje], Zara’s best friend, a Norwegian girl from school, “var på besøk hos oss, fikk jeg lov til å snakke norsk med henne. Ellers var det strengt forbudt å snakke noe annet enn somalisk.” (Ahmed 2008, 22) [was at our house for a visit, I was allowed to speak Norwegian with her. Otherwise it was strictly forbidden to speak anything else aside from Somali]. Forbidding anything but the mother tongue in the home reinforces the domestic sphere as a locus of there (Somalia).

Qualifiers similar to the one in the last paragraph, for example language acquisition, are used to undermine certain character traits that could otherwise be viewed as admirable. For example, “Hun [mor] var usedvanlig tynn til å lage så mye god mat, alle måltidene stod på bordet før magen var rukket å bli sulten igjen” (Ahmed 2008, 20). [She [Mom] was unusually thin to make such delicious food; all of the meals stood on the table before your stomach had the chance to be hungry]. Zara’s mother’s eating disorder doesn’t hinder her from performing her duties as a Somali mother and wife. It does, however, add another layer of weakness to the character’s already subordinated status. “Mors matlyst var ikke det som plaget meg mest. Eller hennes evige mas med å be Elias ta av seg skoene straks han var kommet innenfor døren i

leiligheten” (Ahmed 2008, 30) [Mom’s appetite wasn’t what bugged me the most. Nor was it her unceasing nagging for Elias to take off his shoes the moment he came through the door into the apartment]. What bugs Zara most is never revealed, but what this statement emphasizes is a constant vigilance and critique of the cultured mother. Zara furthers the stigma of her mother’s eating disorder by contrasting herself to her mother’s poor health during a date with Edvard. Zara explains that her brother ”ikke likte å gå tur, han mente at det var en norsk vane som var vond å vende. Og at jeg var blitt litt for norsk, for det var det beste jeg visste” (Ahmed 2008, 79) [didn’t like to go hiking, he thought it was a Norwegian custom that was hard to break. And that I had become a little too Norwegian, as that was my favorite thing]. Hiking (å gå tur) and spending time outdoors (friluftsliv), cornerstones of Norwegian culture, are used not only as a sign of Norwegian acculturation but also as a sign of a healthy lifestyle and body image. In this case the cultured mother is described not only through their actions, but also by characteristics that she lacks or doesn’t pass on to her children. Admittedly, these standards make success a pretty impossible standard for any immigrant mother to meet.

Ahmed expands upon the trope of the cultured mother in chapter 13, where she introduces multiple female perspectives and voices. Culturally appropriate behavior for women changes in accordance with age, development, and social/religious rituals. Zara points this out when she observes that “Problemene begynte da jeg kom i puberteten. Jeg var fortsatt den samme, men reglene forandret seg” (Ahmed 2008, 22) [The problems began when I entered puberty. I was still the same, but the rules changed]. Zara understands her cultured reality but is completely perplexed as to how these oppressive rules are enforced. On a trip to visit her grandmother in London, Zara is privy to the inner circle of women at a family member’s wedding. After sending the bride to the doctor to be cut open for her groom, the women discuss

their views on female genital cutting. It becomes quickly apparent to Zara that it isn't solely men who are the cultural upholders of this violent tradition. The group of women is in consensus that sex on the wedding night is a groom's right. They justify this with their own personal anecdotes. One woman recounts, "Smerten er veldig kortvarig, for ingen menn klarer å holde det gående så lenge av gangen. Jeg husker at blodet dryppet på det hvite lakenet, tårene mine og snørret mitt blandet seg, og han ville ikke kysse meg mer, det eneste som faktisk ikke gjorde vondt. Men han ville fullføre oppgaven sin. Han ble som et dyr, jeg tror synet av blodet hisset ham enda mer opp" (Ahmed 2008, 117) [The pain is short-lived because none of the men can keep it going all that long. I remember that blood dripped on the white sheet, my tears and snot mixed, and he didn't want to kiss me anymore, the only thing that didn't actually hurt. But he wanted to complete his task. He became like an animal, I think the sight of blood turned him on even more].

These stories baffle Zara and she thinks to herself, "Jeg hadde vært sikker på at disse damene ville gjøre alt som stod i deres makt for at unge jenter skulle slippe å gå gjennom den samme smerten som de selv hadde [...] Tvert imot syntes de det var en skam at hun nektet" (Ahmed 2008, 118) [I had been sure that these women would want to do everything in their power so that young women would not have to go through the same pain that they had ... on the contrary, they found it a shameful that she'd refused]. The group of women brushes off Zara's concerns because "Jenter som ikke var omskåret, hadde alltid så mange spørsmål og var vanskeligere å kontrollere." (Ahmed 2008, 120) [Girls that weren't cut always had so many questions and were more difficult to control]. This conversation highlights two things, namely that women are integral to the perpetuation of violent cultural traditions and that these violent

cultural traditions are seen as an exclusive right of passage – those who have been cut have access to a different cultural understanding than those who have not been cut.

Conclusion

Norwegian diasporic literary works that employ the trope of the cultured mother are almost always set in the recent past, based on personal experience, and call for a change in minority and/or immigrant rights in Norway. Such narratives have been termed and categorized – by publishers, media critics, academics, and even by the authors themselves – as “ærefortellinger” [honor narratives]. They adhere to the “Naïve Norge” [Naïve Norway] debate, which has Shabana Rehman and Hege Storhaug as its most outspoken celebrity spokeswomen (Ringheim 2000; Storhaug 2003). They re-imagine, fictionalize, and/or put to memoir their past and images of motherhood in order to illustrate a minority dystopian memory. Their dystopian memory employs detailed and difficult to read, often violent, scenes that depict Homi Bhabha’s *unhomely* in Norway (Bhabha 1992). In other words, these ærefortellinger expose the secret truths of the dystopian minority “honor culture” of the East to the Norwegian public, a readership that adheres to the utopian majority “post-honor culture” of the West (Bowman 2006).³⁹ Their purpose then, via diverse depictions of the cultured mother, is an anti-nostalgic project. It is not to create a longing for the past but to make readers feel hurt, shocked, and ashamed of the past in order to create a space for a culture of minority women’s possibility in Norway’s future.

Dystopian memory can be understood as an inversion of classical dystopian fiction, in which the protagonist hero (Yasmin, Amal, Noreen, Sara, and Zara) opts for the State (the

³⁹ I use James Bowman’s terminology from *Honor: A History*, specifically the book’s “Introduction: Two Kinds of Honor” pp. 1-11, and Chapter 1 “We Are Men: The Islamic Honor Culture and the West” pp. 15-40.

collective, public sphere) instead of the individual (the intimate, private realm). Of the works discussed in this chapter, every second-generation female hero protagonist leaves her family unit at some point in their narrative, a trope I compare to Henrik Ibsen's Nora Helmer in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. They leave their families in the past and, presumably, live to share their story. *Arefortellinger* that incorporate the trope of the cultured mother depict not only a transition from the private sphere to the public sphere, but also portray a path from passive citizenship ("enduring conditional citizenship" by collecting government benefits) to active citizenship (participating in cultural debates by "breaking free" from the restrictions of culture) (Yuval-Davis 2013, 85).

Where the modern welfare states serve as the "mother" of the nation, these authors contrast their ethnic mothers with the political mother of *Velferdsstaten*. In her book *Gender and Nationalism*, Nira Yuval-Davis illustrates a similar trend in her analysis of gendered citizenship in the Scandinavian welfare states versus that of many post-colonial states. She notes that in the Scandinavian welfare states "the state has supplied public facilities to help with women's domestic responsibilities and child care, so as to enable women to go out into the labour market," (Yuval-Davis 2013, 82) whereas in many post-colonial states, "extended family and kinship relationships have continued to be used as foci of loyalty and organization," and that "traditional social and especially familial relations continue to operate and often either women do not have any formal citizenship rights at all, or those rights are very minimal" (Yuval-Davis 2013, 81). These diasporic narratives are inherently liminal and find themselves entangled in opposing traditions of gendered citizenship as detailed in Yuval-Davis' feminist analysis. The cultured mother is described as a passive citizen who exploits the charity of her host culture, a woman

imprisoned by her home culture, and, most egregiously, a hindrance to the active citizenship of her second-generation offspring.

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Chapter 3

“*Den ene*” [The One]: The Influence of the “Creative Mother” on Diasporic Narrativity

Introduction: *Den ene* [The One]: Contextualizing the Creative Mother

In coordination with UNICEF Norge, *Dagbladet* contributed to a campaign in 2009 called “*Den ene*” [The One]. This campaign focused on Norwegian children’s need to be seen and recognizing the person who cared enough to help them when they needed help. As UNICEF Norge states, “Én som bryr seg kan være nok. Mange barn og unge strever av ulike årsaker i hverdagen, uten at voksne virker å vite om det eller bryr seg” (UNICEF Norge).⁴⁰ [Someone who cares can be enough. Many children and adolescents struggle daily for a variety of reasons, without adults knowing about it or caring].⁴¹ Childhood is a very important part of Norwegian society. Similar to the popular children’s narrative *Folk og røvere i Kardemomme by* (1955) [*When the Robbers Came to Cardamom Town* (1968)], this “*Den ene*” project explains that despite past transgressions there is always a place in Norwegian society for its citizens (Egner 1955; 1968). However, this requires an adult to take on the responsibility of integrating this child into Norwegian society. In a sense this is a project of building “Norwegianness.” Rehabilitation (defined here as: re-integration into society, or to restore to good health, to restore formally to former privileges) is integral to the Norwegian nation-building project. The prevailing philosophy of *Kardemomme by*, known as *Kardemommeloven* [the Law of Cardamom], is “Du skal ikke plage andre, du skal være grei og snill, og forøvrig kan man gjøre hva man vil” (Egner 1955). [One shall not bother others, one shall be nice and kind, otherwise one may do as one pleases (Egner 1968)]. This moral of both *Kardemomme by* and “*den ene*” is that Norwegian

⁴⁰ <https://www.unicef.no/denene/hva-handler-den-ene-om>

⁴¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise cited.

society functions best when it includes “outsiders” and takes on the responsibility of helping these “outsiders” to fit in.

Loveleen Rihel Brenna was profiled in *Dagbladet*’s “Den ene” campaign in an article titled “Ble giftet bort som 18-åring” [Married Away as an 18 Year-Old] (Jarlsbo 2009). The article discusses how, 25 years prior, Loveleen was a lonely teenager trying to negotiate her double identity, both Norwegian and Indian. The article discusses Loveleen and her family’s travels from India to Norway and the difficulties she had as a school child and later at the University level. The pivotal moment for Loveleen was when she agreed to be filmed for a documentary about children that lived between two cultures. She agreed for NRK to film her and her preparations for an arranged marriage. Loveleen commented about her opportunity to do a documentary and her resulting mentoring relationship with a Norwegian neighbor, Vibeke:

”– Jeg ville jo på TV, samtidig ante jeg ingenting om hvor vanskelig det skulle bli å snakke om disse tingene offentlig. Jeg måtte veie ordene mine på gullvekt, så jeg ikke sa noe som stigmatiserte, krenket eller ble feil for mine foreldre, min mann eller det norske samfunn. Jeg hadde vært ensom før, men nå mistet jeg helt identiteten min. Jeg ble ensbetydende med arrangert ekteskap. Det var det eneste folk ville snakke med meg om. Det var da jeg begynte å gå til Vibeke.”

Loveleen smiler, litt beklemt.

– jeg kom nok både i tide og utide, gjerne flere ganger i uka for å drikke te og spise boler og å lufte tankene mine. Uff, som jeg kjaset ... Gjennom samtalene våre begynte jeg å forstå foreldrene mine. Vibeke hjalp meg med å se hva omsorg er. Jeg hadde ofte spurt meg selv hvem jeg var, om jeg var indisk eller norsk, men Vibeke fikk meg til å spørre hvem jeg var som menneske, hva sto jeg for, hva ville jeg? Vibeke hjalp meg med å se mening i det indre kaoset” (Jarlsbo 2009).

[–I wanted to be on TV, but at the same time I didn’t sense how difficult it would be to talk about these things publicly. I had to weigh my words in gold, so I didn’t say anything stigmatizing, violated or wronged my parents, my husband, or Norwegian society. I’d been lonely before, but now I completely lost my identity. I became a synonym for arranged marriage. It was the only thing people wanted to talk to me about. It was then that I started going to Vibeke.

Loveleen smiles, a little uneasy.

- I visited at all hours, preferably multiple times a week to drink tea and eat sweet buns and air my thoughts. Ugh, how I pestered ... Through our conversations I began to understand my parents. Vibeke helped me to see what caring meant. I had often asked myself who I was, if I was Indian or Norwegian, but Vibeke got me to ask myself who I was as a person, what I did I stand for, what did I want? Vibeke helped me to understand the meaning of my inner chaos.]

Vibeke is clearly “den ene” in this integration narrative as she is a caring adult to Loveleen during her daily struggles.

This theme or spirit of “den ene” seems to reverberate throughout some of Norway’s diasporic literature – a phenomenon I term the “creative mother.” I use “den ene” and “the creative mother” as synonyms or as interchangeable concepts as they both describe an “insider” (native Norwegian) who cares enough to help an “outsider” (in this case an author of immigrant background). The creative mother is a character trope found in diaspora literature that inspires the author to complete their journey to self-actualization. Meaning that the creative mother either 1) motivates the author to untether themselves from the oppressive demands of their home culture and/or 2) encourages or inspires the author to write their story. The trope of the creative mother provides concrete examples of how native Norwegians are influential in individual migrants’ socialization into Norwegian society. In other words, native Norwegians are not necessarily publishing these diasporic works, but there is certainly evidence that native Norwegians are influential in both the integration process and the publishing process.

In this chapter, I will present this phenomenon of Norwegian diaspora literature, that is to say, the trope of the creative mother. Paralleling the concept of “den ene,” this creative mother is a non-family member who serves as a Norwegian cultural interpreter of sorts. The creative mother varies in magnitude of influence from fictional characters (for example in Khalid Hussain’s *Pakkis*, 1986 and Amal Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling*,

2011), an encouraging friend (e.g. in Hadia Tajik's "Fortellingen om Hadia", 2009 and Loveleen Rihel Brenna's *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*, 2012), an academic (Maria Amelie's *Ulovlig Norsk*, 2010), and a co-author (cf Sarita Skagnes and Lene Wikander's *Bare en datter*, 2007). For the purposes of this analysis, I have separated these different creative mothers into three categories according to their magnitude of influence, the categories being: passive influence (fictional friend), active influence (academic advisor or trusted mentor), and invasive influence (co-author).

- Passive Influence
 - Fictional Friend
 - Khalid Hussain's *Pakkis* (1986)
 - Amal Aden's *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2011)
- Active Influence
 - Academic Advisor
 - Hadia Tajik's "Fortellingen om Hadia" (2009)
 - Maria Amelie's *Ulovlig Norsk* (2010)
 - Trusted Mentor
 - Loveleen Rihel Brenna's *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012)
- Invasive Influence
 - Co-author
 - Sarita Skagnes & Lene Wikander's *Bare en datter* (2007)

Finding a creative mother is a totally natural and normal occurrence for anyone, but particularly significant for authors and for persons of immigrant background. It is therefore not surprising that these characters exist in the literature. However, despite the regularity of their presence, there is much diversity within the trope as the character of the creative mother varies from extremely helpful to overly invasive in the storytelling. The creative mother can serve as the only understanding, empathetic character that the protagonist encounters, a relief from their difficult life. On the other hand, the creative mother can also be a voice so overbearing that she calls into question ethics of exploitation, using one story to speak for an entire population of experiences. I conclude that, regardless of the magnitude of influence, the function of the character of the

creative mother exists as a narrative tool to help the second-generation writer find agency, tell their story, and/or to decide their own destiny.

Before my presentation of the trope of the creative mother in Norwegian diaspora literature, I would like to comment briefly on the image that accompanies Loveleen’s article “Ble giftet bort som 18-åring” [Married Away as an 18 Year-Old] (Jarlsbo 2009). Accompanying the article is a picture of Loveleen and Vibeke Mostad at Vibeke’s dinner table.



Loveleen Rihel Brenna and Vibeke Mostad have one of their many conversations at Vibeke’s kitchen table.⁴²

The table is set with traditional Norwegian bread, various “pålegg” [meats, cheeses, and spreads], and tea. They sit across from one another, in apparent deep and meaningful conversation.

Vibeke’s kitchen table is both elegant and adorned with the typical visual symbols of the Norwegian concept of “koselig” [cozy]: flowers, warm drink, subdued lighting, candles, and a

⁴² Photo courtesy of Agnete Brun (Jarlsbo).

friendly chat. I would like to highlight how this image of “den ene” is one of a nurturing, understanding character that welcomes the second-generation author into Norwegian society. This image depicts the domestic sphere as a location of inclusion, acceptance, discovery, and agency. In Chapter 2, “Dystopian Memory: The ‘Cultured Mother’ in Diasporic Narratives of Victimization and Violence,” I argue that various authors use the domestic sphere, the realm of the cultured mother, as a site of gendered oppression. This image similarly depicts women as bearers of cultural values, however the domestic sphere is instead a location of inclusion, and not a locus of dystopian memory. The creative mother – *den ene* [the one] – and the cultured mother – *den andre* [the other] – are contrasting tropes, where the similar concepts of domesticity and nurturing are interpreted and received differently by diasporic authors depending upon who is the source of care, either *den ene* or *den andre*.

The Passive Influence of the Creative Mother

The passive influence of the creative mother is evident in two novels, *Pakkis* and *Min drøm om frihet*, where the creative mother is a fictional friend(s) to the protagonist character. These creative mother characters – Trude, Liv, and Rune – are integral to the integration processes of the protagonist and assist them to self-actualize in a time of distress. However, what makes these characters passive is they do not directly influence the narrativity or the actual writing and/or authorship of the novels. Though real world people may have inspired them, these characters are strictly literary in their function and serve to advance the plot and help the protagonist on their journey.

Pakkis (1986) [Packi], by Khalid Hussain, is a young adult novel that follows Sajjad’s cultural conflicts as a young Pakistani teenager living in Norway. The novel highlights the

problems of the second generation, where the protagonist feels pulled between the polar opposite cultures of his family (Pakistan) and his host country (Norway). The narrator highlights the emotional strain of this dual life: “Det var jo helt annerledes med Sajjad. Han hadde vokst opp i dette samfunnet, snakket språket, oppførte seg som en hvilken som helst gutt, kledde seg som de andre, for det meste i hvert fall – hver gang til farens store fortvilelse. Så hvorfor skulle det bli så vanskelig for ham å vokse opp og bo i dette samfunnet? Det kunne han ikke forstå” (Hussain 1986, 84-5). [“Sajjad’s situation was completely different, of course. He had grown up in this society, spoke the language, acted like any other boy, dressed like the others, for the most part at least – always to his father’s great despair. So why should it be so difficult for him to grow up and live in this society? That he couldn’t understand” (Hussain 2013, 55)]. Sajjad exemplifies the intricate balancing act of second-generation Pakistani-Norwegian youths, where these youths need to adhere to their family’s strict Muslim morals while still trying to fit into a liberal and open Norway. The creative mother in this novel is a character found at the crux of this conflict that provides understanding solace and refuge from the difficulties of Sajjad’s cultural tug of war. After being peer pressured to drink alcohol at a party – which is the quintessential Norwegian youth experience and a forbidden Muslim experience – and confronting the fact that his parents are sending his sister, Nadia, back to Pakistan in order for her to be properly acculturated as a good Pakistani woman – the quintessential Pakistani youth experience and viewed as discriminatory in the gender equal Norway – Sajjad seeks out a calm, safe space where he can contemplate his life’s dilemma.

The conflict that breaks Sajjad is a discussion of his future traditional Pakistani arranged marriage. His mother pleads with him to understand, “Jeg har også en drøm om at du skal hente din pakistanske kone hjem som min svigerdatter. Kan ikke du forstå en mors drøm?” (Hussain

1986, 107) [“I also have a dream that you will bring your Pakistani wife home as my daughter-in-law. Can’t you understand a mother’s dream?” (Hussain 2013, 70).] Unwilling to identify with or accept his mother’s dream, Sajjad demands the right to choose his future partner and when he will marry. He runs away from home twice, and on the second attempt he meets his friend Trude, a Norwegian girl who lives in their same apartment building. Trude and Sajjad have a pre-established relationship and understand each other, as “Nå hadde de i hvert fall noe til felles: De hadde begge flyttet fra det stedet de opprinnelig tilhørte, selv om det er stor forskjell på Pakistan og Mo i Rana” (Hussain 1986, 90). [“they had both moved from the place where they originally were from, even if Pakistan and Mo i Rana were very different” (Hussain 2013, 59).] Trude is a sympathetic friend to Sajjad as she understands the complications of migration, her mother is an East German immigrant in Norway and Trude, herself, recently moved from Mo i Rana, Norway’s rural countryside, to Oslo, Norway’s largest city.

In Chapter 17 (Hussain 1986, 71-5; Hussain 2013, 71-5), Trude serves as Sajjad’s creative mother. Trude invites Sajjad into her family’s home and listens to his dilemma patiently and asks him understanding and encouraging questions: “Hvorfor kunne du ikke være deg selv?”, ”Hva er du mest redd for?”, ”Hva var det som hendte i dag side du var på vei ut så tidlig?”, ”Og hva vil du?” (Hussain 1986, 112-4). [“Why couldn’t you just be yourself?”, “What scares you the most?”, “What happened today since you were on your way out so early?”, “And what do you want?” (Hussain 2013, 73-4)] Once the conversation concludes, Sajjad is exhausted and lies down in Trude’s bed. Trude acts as a stand-in mother and comforts her friend, “Etter en stund går hun bort til ham og tar av ham sokkene. Skyver dyna over ham. Han har et lite utydelig smil i ansiktet. Merker etter tårene har han fremdeles” (Hussain 1986, 114) [“After a while she walked over to him and took off his socks. Pulled the covers over him. He had a faint

smile on his face. There were still traces of tears” (Hussain 2013, 75)]. With the approval of Trude’s mother, Sajjad stays in their home a short while longer until he has built up the strength to confront his parents again. When Sajjad awakes Trude’s mother feeds him “flere brødsiver med geitost og [...] to glass melk” (Hussain 1986, 177). [“a few slices of bread with goat cheese and [...] two glasses of milk” (Hussain 2013, 78).] and he goes for a stroll with Trude to further decompress. They resume pondering Sajjad’s dilemma while Trude patiently listens and continues to ask encouraging questions. When Sajjad worries he has been a bother, Trude kindly responds “- ikke tull ’a, Sajjad. That’s what friends are for, you know” (Hussain 1986, 119). [“Don’t be silly, Sajjad. That’s what friends are for, you know.”] (Hussain, 2013, 80).]

In the final chapter, Sajjad acknowledges Trude’s role as a creative mother by going to her home and assuring her that he has benefitted from her kindness and that she doesn’t need to be concerned about his safety and housing situation for the time being. They share a conversation about resolution.

“- Husker du det som hendte i går morges? At du pratet om de tingene du hadde inni deg? Sajjad nikker.

- Ja, jeg husker at jeg holdt et foredrag for deg.

Trude må le.

- Kaller du det et foredrag? Jeg syntes det var veldig fint at du snakket. Synes ikke du det også?

- Jo, det var deilig.

- Hva er det som har skjedd i dag, siden du er så blid?

Sajjad smiler.

- Jeg har pratet med far, eller det var han som pratet med meg. Han skal ikke ta avgjørelser som har med mitt liv å gjøre. Det er deilig. Forresten, jeg stakk innom for at du skulle få vite at jeg har kommet hjem, så slipper du tenke så mye på meg. Han reiser seg opp igjen” (Hussain 1986, 132-3).

[“Do you remember what happened yesterday morning? That you talked about the things on your mind?

Sajjad nodded.

“Yes, I remember that I held a lecture for you.” Trude had to laugh.

“Do you call that a lecture? I thought it was really good that you talked. Don’t you think so too?”

“Yes, it was great.”

“What’s happened today, since you’re so happy?”

Sajjad smiled.

“I’ve talked with my father, or, rather, it was he who talked with me. He’s not going to make decisions about things that concern my life. That’s great. Besides, I stopped by to let you know that I’ve come home, so you don’t have to think so much about me.” He got up. (Hussain 2013, 87-8).]

The reader never learns if Sajjad decides to join his family on their summer trip to Pakistan, but the novel takes special note of Trude’s kindness and thanks her for assisting him in finding himself, Sajjad as an individual. With Trude’s consul, Sajjad is now able to collect his thoughts and decide for himself. Though Trude takes up little page-space in the novel, her character and the domestic sphere of her home are integral to Sajjad’s journey towards self-discovery.

A much more nuanced example of the passive influence of the creative mother is found in a couple that befriends and assists the protagonist in Amal Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009). *Min drøm om frihet* is what the author describes as “en blandingssjanger, midt imellom en selvbiografi og en roman” (Aden 2009, 8) [a blended genre, right in the middle of autobiography and novel]. The creative mother in this narrative is a character inspired by Aden’s real world Norwegian friends, Elisabeth and Rune, and fictionalized as the characters Liv and Rune. She explains this important relationship in her introduction,

“De viktigste norske mennesker i livet mitt, Elisabeth og Rune, er ikke direkte omtalt i denne boken. Det skyldes at de er så nært forbundet med stoff jeg av sikkerhetsmessige grunner ikke kunne skrive om. Men figurene Liv og Rune i fortellingen min er om dem; de har samme funksjon som gode hjelpere. En annen gang kan jeg kanskje skrive livshistorien min på en mer tradisjonell måte [...] Du skal ikke stole på de konkrete opplysningene i denne boken, de kan være oppdiktete. Men lev deg inn i konfliktene, miljøskildringen, dialogene, stemningen og persongalleriet. Det er her boken er sann og ekte” (Aden 2009, 8-9).

[The most important Norwegian people in my life, Elisabeth and Rune, are not directly mentioned in this book. This is because they are so closely connected to the subject that I could not, for safety’s sake, write about them. But the characters Liv and Rune in my

story are reminiscent of them; they have the same function as good helpers. Maybe another time I can write my life story in a more traditional way [...] You shouldn't believe the specific information in this book, as it may be fictional. But live in the conflicts, the depictions of environment, the dialogues, the atmosphere, and the cast of characters. This is where the book is true and real.]

Though Elisabeth and Rune have been fictionalized, their role is described as “gode hjelpere” [good helpers] in both fiction and fact. In my terminology they serve as Aden's creative mothers as they were integral to Aden's self-actualization and decision to write her story. In Aden's words: “Jeg er en overlever, og jeg vil gjerne dele min historie med deg. Jeg har reist langt” (Aden 2009, 9) [I am a survivor, and I would like to share my story with you. I've traveled far.]

As *Min drøm om frihet* details Aden's immigration and integration processes, her creative mothers aren't introduced until later in the narrative as it takes time for Aden to learn Norwegian and form a network in her host country. Aden meets Liv in chapter 39. And after 38 chapters of loneliness, Aden declares that “Det er ingenting som er tilfeldig, det har jeg bestandig visst. I dag blir min drøm oppfylt, i dag blir mine bønner hørt. I dag begynner en ny fremtid. Grunnen til dette er Liv. I dag, en onsdag i januar, er første dagen jeg snakker med Liv, Liv som kommer til å bety så mye for meg” (Aden 2009, 93). [There is nothing that is random, that I have always known. Today my dream was fulfilled and today my prayers were heard. Today I begin a new future. The reason for that is Liv. Today, a Wednesday in January is the first day I spoke with Liv, who is going to mean so much to me.] Liv, whose name means “life,” is described as a young woman, a few years older than Aden, with a pleasant and friendly temperament who “smiler og hilser bestandig” (Aden 2009, 93) [smiles and always greets others.] Liv invites Aden into her home for a chat, which is the first Norwegian home Aden is ever invited into. Aden describes Liv's home in terms of its difference from what she is familiar with: “Hybelen til Liv ser svært annerledes ut enn andre hjem jeg har vært i. Det lukter annerledes også, det lukter ikke

søt røkelse som det ofte gjør hjemme hos somaliere. Vi koser oss med kjeks og brus. Liv sier hun syns det er spennende å prate med meg som har en helt annen kultur enn henne” (Aden 2009, 93)

[Liv’s apartment looks very different than other homes I’ve been in. It smells different also; it doesn’t smell like sweet incense like it often does at Somali homes. We enjoy ourselves with cookies and soda. Liv says that she thinks it’s exciting to chat with me who is from a totally different culture than her.] Liv’s home, in contrast to the homes of the Somali community, is a cozy place where Aden can finally relax.

Domestic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, become an integral way that Aden and Liv form a bond. Meal times become a sacred time, almost ritualistic, for the friends.

“Jeg er heldig som har møtt Liv. I dag har Liv bedt meg på middag. Vi lager mat sammen. Vi steker laks og koker poteter. Liv og jeg kan prate om alt mulig. Liv er tålmodig og hjelper meg til å finne de norske ordene når jeg får problemer. Etter middagen tar vi oppvasken sammen, lager somalisk te og finner frem kjeks. Vi tar med oss teen og kjeksene og setter oss i sofaen” (Aden 2009, 93-4).

[I’m lucky to have met Liv. Today Liv has invited me to dinner. We cook together. We pan-fry salmon and boil potatoes. Liv and I can talk about everything. Liv is patient and helps me to find the Norwegian words when I’m having trouble. After dinner we clean the dishes together, make Somali tea and eat crackers. We take the tea and crackers and sit on the couch].

The two discuss life’s difficulties and successes. It is in Liv’s home, her domestic space, that Aden learns to enjoy life, she builds confidence, she learns to speak better Norwegian, and she is introduced to other Norwegian customs that she enjoys – particularly “å gå tur” [to go on a hike].

“En dag er Liv og jeg ute og går tur, selv om det er litt snø på bakken. Liv ler av meg når jeg sier at jeg er ’snøredd’. Jeg synes det er skummelt å gå når det ligger snø på bakken, men Liv sier at det må jeg bare venne meg til. Hver gang vi går tur, lærer jeg meg nye ord, i dag har jeg lært *park* og *kuldegrader*. Samtidig som jeg lærer nye ord, lærer jeg også mye om landet. I dag fikk jeg vite at det ikke er lov til å gå med kniv i Norge. For meg som er oppvokst under krigen i Somalia, er dette vanskelig å forstå; jeg er jo vant til å måtte forsvare meg” (Aden 2009, 94).

[One day Liv and I are out for a hike, even though there’s some snow on the ground. Liv laughs at me when I say that I’m “snowscared.” I think it’s scary to walk when there’s

snow on the ground, but Liv says that I just need to get used to it. Every time we go on a hike, I learn new words; today I learned *park* and *negative degrees*. While learning new words, I also learn a lot about the country. Today I was told that I'm not allowed to carry a knife in Norway. For someone who is raised in war-torn Somalia, it's difficult to understand; I'm, of course, used to having to protect myself.]

Aden's visits with Liv add tools to her proverbial toolbox; she gains cultural knowledge through her creative mother that helps her to survive in her new country. Via Liv, Aden learns how to navigate a new geography with a drastically different climate; as well as how to navigate new cultural norms, especially the disparate attitudes towards conflict resolution and violence. All of these are skills that Aden recognizes to be prerequisites to success and citizenry in Norway. As she states, "Nå som jeg er mye sammen med Liv, er det lettere å like Norge. Det er lettere å like landet nå som jeg skjønner litt av hva som blir sagt rundt meg, og selv kan gjøre meg litt forstått" (Aden 2009, 95). [Now that I'm hanging with Liv a lot, it's easier to like Norway. It's easier to like the country now that I understand a little more of what is said around me, and even can make myself better understood.] Liv serves not only as a cultural interpreter and an informal language tutor, but she also guides Aden in her quest to find wellbeing and emotional stability. "Liv har sagt til meg at man aldri må miste troen på seg selv, det er aldri for sent å begynne på nytt, og man må ta imot den hjelpen man kan få, men man må kjempe selv også. Jeg føler at Liv har gitt meg en ny sjanse. Den skal jeg ta vare på" (Aden 2009, 98). [Liv has told me to never lose faith in oneself because it's never too late to begin again, and that one has to take the help that one can get but must also fight for oneself. I feel that Liv has given me another chance. I'm going to take advantage of that chance.] Aden trusts in her creative mother and leans on her as one would lean on family.

Aden's perspective of Liv's role is unwelcome in her Somali community – especially amongst male members. The most vocal critic of her newfound relationship is Aden's childhood

friend, Mustafa. “Til og med Mustafa og guttene som har kommet rett fra krigen i Somalia, vil ikke at jeg skal være sammen med de hvite, de vantro. Jeg får høre at jeg kommer til å bli en hore, og at jeg vil bli lurt” (Aden 2009, 97). [Sometimes Mustafa and the boys who’ve come straight from the war in Somalia don’t want me to hang around the whites, the unbelievers. I’ll hear that I’m going to be a whore and that I’ll be fooled]. Though Aden doesn’t want to break completely with her Somali identity (language, culture, and friends), she prefers to be with her new (Norwegian) friends as they support her, encourage her, and, most importantly, don’t have such strict gendered social regulations.

The difference in Somali vs. Norwegian gender roles and gendered expectations plays a much more significant role in the end of *Min drøm om frihet*, especially as it is directly tied to the role of the creative mother. Rune, Liv’s boyfriend turned *samboer* [live-in partner], becomes another one of Aden’s creative mothers. As a manager of a McDonalds in Oslo, Rune helps Aden get her first job working shifts at the local franchise and they develop a deep friendship and respect for one another. Aden sees Rune as both a mentor and a stand-in family member. Rune reciprocates Aden’s feelings, “Rune har sagt at han ser på meg som Livs søster. Jeg er veldig glad i Rune, han er en virkelig god venn” (Aden 2009, 110). [Rune has said that he thinks of me as Liv’s sister. I’m so fond of Rune; he truly is a good friend]. The couple is a narrative depiction of the sociological concept of the “negotiated family” (Giddens 1991, 1992, 1998) or, what is now known as the “democratic family” (Ahlberg, et. al. 2008). Sociologists Jenny Ahlberg, Christine Roman, and Simon Duncan detail the “democratic family” and its relationship to modernization. Relevant to this analysis is their definition of the “democratic family”: “Relationships in this ‘democratic family’ are based on mutual respect, which naturally also means that they have to be free from violence” (Ahlberg, et. al. 2008, 80). Regardless of the

successes or plausibility of family policies that promote the notion of the “democratic family,” it is nonetheless a concept entrenched in Scandinavian social policy and lauded by Aden in *Min drøm om frihet*. Aden admires the way Liv and Rune treat each other and praises how she feels included in their caring relationship, “Det er bestandig fint å være sammen med Rune og Liv. De har begge mye omsorg å gi, og er det noe jeg setter stor pris på, er det å få omsorg. De forstår meg og støtter meg” (Aden 2009, 130). [It’s always nice to be with Rune and Liv. They both have a lot of *omsorg* (care) to give, and if there’s something that I appreciate, it’s getting *omsorg* (care). They understand me and support me.] In this passage, the narrator makes special note of how Rune, a Norwegian man, always takes on a caring role, a stereotype she attributes only to women. Aden’s hyperawareness to the de-gendered role *omsorg* [care] plays in Norwegian society justifies the inclusion of Rune in the category of “mother.” A citation that further details this attention to gender equality in Norwegian society is the narrator’s observation of the couple’s joint journey through pregnancy: “Rune kysser magen til Liv og prater med jenta som er der inne. Det virker som Rune er glad og fornøyd selv om det er ei jente de venter. Jeg håper Yassin og jeg får barn og at vi kan være like lykkelige som Liv og Rune” (Aden 2009, 141). [Rune kisses Liv’s stomach and talks with the girl who is inside. It appears that Rune is happy and satisfied even though they’re expecting a girl. I hope Yassin and I have children and that we can be as happy as Liv and Rune]. Aden highlights how Rune is excited to become a father, despite the fact that they are having a daughter instead of a son.

Aden’s relationship with her creative mothers and her appreciation for them intensifies throughout the narrative. She details that as their bond strengthens so does her wellbeing,

“I kveld skal jeg til familien min i Norge, Liv og Rune har bedt meg på middag. Vi koser oss med kylling og ris, det er godt å være sammen med dem. De er stille og rolige, og hos dem kan jeg slappe skikkelig av. Jeg har bestandig trodd at for å være familie må man ha

samme blod, men nå vet jeg at det ikke er nødvendig. Jeg er ekstremt takknemlig for at jeg har møtt Liv og Rune” (Aden 2009, 143-144).

[Tonight I’m going to my family in Norway’s house. Liv and Rune have invited me to dinner. We enjoy ourselves with chicken and rice, it’s good to be with them. They’re quiet and calm and I can actually relax with them. I’ve always believed that to be family you need the same blood, but now I know that that’s not necessary. I am extremely grateful that I’ve met Liv and Rune].

The experiences with Aden’s creative mothers that help her to succeed in Norway contrast her experiences within her Somali community, which is a community that pulls her from self-actualization and positive wellbeing. Labor and access to finances are concepts used to define Rune as a creative mother and are described in conflict with Aden’s husband, Yassin, who stunts Aden’s journey to fulfillment. Whereas Rune secures two jobs while obtaining an education and helps Aden to become financially independent (meaning that she is no longer reliant on social welfare), Yassin demands remittances from Aden that leave the couple in a financially precarious situation.

“Rune gleder seg til å begynne i ny jobb. Han sier han har en god nyhet til meg, han har snakket med McDonald’s i Holmestrand, og de trenger flere medarbeidere. Selv om det ikke blir noen fast jobb med det første, kan jeg jobbe som vikar. Jeg er kjempeglad. Liv skal gå hjemme med Silje det første året etter at hun er født. Rune vet at jeg har sendt mye penger til Somalia i det siste, han sier at han er urolig for at jeg sender for mye penger, jeg må tenke på meg selv og min egen fremtid også. Rune vet ikke at det er Yassin som maser om penger hele tiden, og at det er derfor det meste av pengene mine forsvinner ut av landet. Jeg har dårlig samvittighet overfor Yassin selv om jeg sender ham penger hele tiden, men jeg føler at jeg aldri sender nok” (Aden 2009, 151).

[Rune is looking forward to beginning his new job. He says he has good news for me, he’s spoken with McDonald’s in Holmestrand and they need more staff. Although there are no permanent positions at the moment, I can work as a substitute. I’m very happy. Liv will stay home with Silje for her first year. Rune knows I’ve sent a lot of money to Somalia recently, he says that he’s unnerved that I send so much money; I need to think about my own future and myself also. Rune doesn’t know that it’s Yassin who is asking for money all the time, and that that is why most of my money disappears from the country. I feel guilty about Yassin’s situation even though I send him money all the time, but I feel like I never send enough.]

Juxtaposing Rune (a creative mother who helps with employment and financial stability) with Yassin (a demanding husband and financial burden) serves a combination of purposes. The argument Aden makes is it is masculine to help women obtain financial independence, it is manly to value *omsorg* [care], that it is manly to act in a maternal way towards fellow countrymen. *Min drøm om frihet* ends with a domestic violence scare, Yassin becomes emotionally abusive and physically threatening. Aden's creative mothers save her from her home and drive her to the crisis center in Tønsberg – literally removing her from her Somali community and trusting her in the hands of Norwegian authorities.

The Active Influence of the Creative Mother

The trope of the creative mother can also be a real, non-fiction person referenced in non-fiction works, such as *livsfortellinger* (life stories) or memoirs, written by women authors of immigrant background. The attributes that qualify or characterize these examples of the creative mother as active is that their intervention serves as a creative catalyst or a creative spark to the author's professional activity. The active creative mother is the person in the author's life who encourages them to write their story, to break from their collective identity and assert their individuality. These active creative mothers encourage the protagonist/author to follow their dream, to pursue higher education, and embark on a thoughtful, meaningful vocation – all of which are in opposition to the stereotypical, cultured role of a dutiful, silent immigrant wife and mother. I will provide a brief introduction to the active creative mother in Hadia Tajik's self-promotional, auto-biographical YouTube video "Fortellingen om Hadia" (2009), then I will go into more detail about the trope's active presence in two written memoirs: Maria Amelie's first

memoir *Ulovlig norsk* (2010), and Loveleen Rihel Brenna's memoir *Min annerledeshet min styrke* (2012).

Hadia Tajik is currently the nesteleder [Vice President] of Arbeiderpartiet [The Norwegian Labor Party], and has become a well-known and respected politician. The Norwegian public first met Tajik when she edited and contributed to *Svart på hvitt* (2001) [Black on White], a collection of autobiographical short stories written by Norwegians of immigrant background. However, before the Norwegian public knew her as a politician, Tajik released a series of promotional YouTube videos for her stortings kandidat [parliamentary candidate] campaign in 2009. The purpose of these videos was for Tajik, a native of Rogaland, a mostly rural county of Southwestern Norway, to introduce herself to the Oslo district – Norway's most urban county, located in Eastern Norway – in which she was the Labor Party's new candidate. In the YouTube video series she details the people, events, and places that shaped her as person and, more importantly, as a candidate.

Though her videos are spoken narratives, as opposed to the more traditional written memoirs, they nonetheless provide an account of a second-generation immigrant's integration journey. One of the YouTube videos, "Fortellingen om Hadia,"⁴³ is autobiographical and provides an apt example of an active creative mother. As previously mentioned, Tajik was a known author and journalist. In that capacity, she was most recognized for her thoughts on integreringsdebatten [the integration debate], arranged marriages, culture conflicts, integration, and racism as a youth journalist in Stavanger. What led to her journalistic success was a schoolteacher's helpful advice. Tajik describes,

⁴³ I have transcribed the video series from Tajik's Stavanger/Nynorsk dialect to Bokmål. Therefore quotations from the video series are provided in my transcribed language.

“Men heldigvis hadde jeg en veldig klok lærer på videregående, han sa til meg at du kan ikke bare skrive om bakgrunnen din hele tida, du må skrive om mer, då vil du for det første få en mer lengre liv som en skribent. Men for den andre så er det alltid bedre å praktisere integrering eller bare snak om det eller skriv om det hele tiden. Jeg skrev så mye jeg kunne og om så mye jeg kunne. Jeg begynte å søke for sommervikariat som journalist. Jeg fikk avslag av alle fleste sine, men det var en som trodde på meg: *Aftenposten*. Før jeg hadde fylt atten år, så fikk jeg en vikariat som journalist i kulturreportasjeavdelingen” (Tajik 2009).

[But luckily I had a very wise teacher in high school, he said to me that you can't only write about your background all of the time, you have to write about more, then, firstly, you'll have a longer life as a writer. But, secondly, it's better to practice integration not just talk about it or write about it all the time. I wrote as much as I could about as much as I could. I began to search for a summer internship positions as a journalist. I was rejected from most, but there was one who believed in me. *Aftenposten*. Before I turned eighteen years old, I got a temporary job as a journalist in the culture department].

Tajik credits her wise teacher for pointing her in the correct direction that ultimately lead to a successful summer internship with *Aftenposten*, and later a successful career as a journalist and politician. Her teacher serves as the creative mother in her narrative, a person who gives good advice and provides direction amidst her struggles with her background and her integration.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Norway's leading social anthropologist, appears in Maria Amelie's memoir *Ulovlig norsk* (2010) as the academic force behind their narratives. Eriksen is known and respected in both the Norwegian academy and also within the public sphere as he often partakes in televised and newspaper debates regarding identity, nationalism, and globalization. Eriksen is a prolific publisher, his influential publications include: *Flerkulturell forståelse* (1997), *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2001), *Engaging Anthropology: The Case for a Public Presence* (2006), *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and North America* (2007), *Paradoxes of Cultural Recognition* (2009), and *A World of Insecurity: Anthropological Perspectives of Human Security* (2010), among many others. He is the creative mother who encourages the writing process for Amelie's memoir, encouraging her to use her voice and to get her story out to the Norwegian public. I

would like to quickly address my continued use of the pronoun “he” when discussing the creative mother. In this literature, as described in my analysis of Amal Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet*, gender roles are presented as contrasts in the host versus the home cultures. In these narratives, Norwegian men are recognized, and occasionally applauded, for taking on nurturing roles that are stereotypically female. Acknowledging this, I continue to allow for men to be included in the trope of the creative mother.

In *Ulovlig norsk*, Maria Amelie⁴⁴ details her family’s experiences fleeing their native Russia and living undocumented⁴⁵ (as illegal immigrants) for over eight years in Norway. Her story explains how her family has successfully resided in Norway without a *personnummer* [Norwegian social security number], credit card, or any form of official identification. Similar to the previously described narratives, Amelie’s narrative details what it is like to be a cultural outsider living in Norway. However, the tone of her memoir is quite unique as she tries to convince the reader that she is “Norwegian” despite her birth country and her (lack of) citizenship. In her article, “Den norske skyldfølelsen i Maria Amelies *Ulovlig norsk* og *Takk*,” the literary scholar Ellen Rees observes, “Hensikten med *Ulovlig norsk* er først og fremst å overbevise leserne om at Amelie fortjener en plass i det norske samfunnet, selv om det tilsynelatende ikke finnes gyldig juridisk grunnlag for dette” (Rees 2016, 189). [The purpose of *Ulovlig norsk* is first and foremost to convince readers that Amelie deserves a place in Norwegian society, although there is apparently no valid legal basis for this.] The memoir’s activist tone plays to Norway’s historical tradition of humanitarian aid and refugee assistance

⁴⁴ Maria Amelie is Madina Salamova’s pen name. After the book was released, the author received significant press and revealed her real name. After an intense legal battle and one deportation, she was ultimately allowed to legally remain in Norway and awarded residency.

⁴⁵ Though the title, *Ulovlig norsk* [Illegally Norwegian] uses the term “illegal,” I instead prefer to refer to an immigrant without papers as “undocumented.”

and questions not only what it means to be “Norwegian” but also what it entails to be a Norwegian citizen.

Amelie received her Bachelors degree and Master’s degree from Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU) [Norwegian University of Science and Technology] where she studied social anthropology and met Thomas Hylland Eriksen when he was invited to campus to give lectures. Amelie and Eriksen met every time he came to campus and discussed globalization, his research, as well as Amelie’s Master’s thesis – however, Eriksen was mostly interested in how Amelie was able to live in Norway as undocumented. Amelie describes the encounter in her memoir:

“Et tema vi alltid vendte tilbake til hver gang vi møttes, var hvordan jeg klarte å leve i Norge. Når han så på meg, kunne jeg lese forbløffelse i øyene hans. Jeg sa en setning som jeg hadde tenkt på mange ganger før: ’Av og til lurte jeg på om jeg skal skrive en bok om dette, beskrive hvordan ting er, slik at mennesker kan få høre i hvert fall én asylsøkerhistorie!’

Jeg hørte meg selv si disse ordene og ble flau, hvor tåpelig jeg var. ’Jeg? Skrive bok? Hva er vitsen?’. Thomas, derimot, overrasket meg med å svare: ’Gjør det! Det er en viktig historie å fortelle.’ De ordene glemte jeg ikke. Jeg sa at jeg lover å tenke på det, men innerst inne hadde jeg bestemt meg. Jeg ville heller skrive en bok enn å ta imot et falskt pass” (Amelie 2010, 173-4).

[A theme we always returned to each time we met, was how I managed to live in Norway. When he looked at me, I could read his astonishment in his eyes. I said a sentence that I had thought many times before: “Sometimes I wonder if I should write a book about this, describe how things are, so that people can hear at least one asylum seeker’s story!”

I heard myself say these words as I became embarrassed, how foolish I was. “Me? Write a book? What’s the point?” Thomas, however, surprised me by answering: “Do it! It is an important story to tell.” Those words I did not forget. I said that I promised to think about it, but deep down inside I had decided. I’d rather write a book than accept a false passport].

Eriksen legitimizes Amelie’s narrative with his academic credentials. And similarly, she legitimizes his scholarship with her real world, on the ground experience. Their relationship is symbiotic because they actively influence each other. Eriksen is described as the active academic

influence (or her creative mother), which tipped the scale and convinced Amelie to tell her story to the Norwegian public.

Vibeke and Loveleen's relationship was introduced previously in this paper as part of *Dagbladets* "den ene" campaign, but here I will detail Vibeke's role as an active creative mother as depicted in Loveleen's memoir, *Min annerledeshet min styrke* (2012). Loveleen's memoir details her journey from her childhood in India to her role in a national leadership position and the founding of Seema. Seema is her non-profit and crowning accomplishment for it is how she can give back to other immigrant women who experience similar difficulties. The mission of *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* is to describe the integration problems and culture conflicts particular to the experiences of women who migrate from "traditional" cultures (in Loveleen's case India) to liberal, Western Norway in hopes that this message reaches an empathetic audience. The creative mother, Vibeke, is Loveleen's helper at the crossroads of these two contrasting cultures. Loveleen consults Vibeke when she feels torn between her two cultures. Vibeke is Loveleen's adult friend whom she can go to for help, particularly when she needs to talk about generational and/or culture conflicts. To Loveleen, Vibeke is the ideal Norwegian woman. Vibeke is described as elegant, beautiful, fashionable, and wise. Vibeke's relationship to her husband Jon, to Loveleen, is egalitarian and perfect. Loveleen observes that "For meg virket Jon og Vibeke som den perfekte par. Respekten og kjærligheten de følte for hverandre skapte en egen harmoni i hjemmet deres" (Brenna 2012, 84). [To me, Jon and Vibeke seemed like the perfect couple. The respect and love they felt for each other created a special harmony in their home]. Vibeke and Jon's house, their domestic space, visible in the picture in the introduction to this chapter, is not only a location of physical comfort and retreat but also a location of philosophical safety and comfort.

Vibeke is also an active listener to Loveleen. She encourages Loveleen to express her concerns and to get things off her chest. By asking guiding questions, Vibeke assists Loveleen in working out her crises, examples of these questions are: “Hva er det verste?”, “Tror du ikke dine foreldre kjenner deg?”, “Hva tror du forskjellen mellom dine foreldre og de norske foreldre?” (Brenna 2012, 84-6) [What is the worst?, Don’t you think your parents know you?, What do you think the difference is between your parents and Norwegian parents?]. In her narrative, Loveleen expresses gratitude for the significant role that Vibeke, her creative mother, played in her acculturation process. Loveleen notes that,

“På vei hjem tenkte jeg på hvor heldig jeg var som hadde Vibeke å gå til. Hun hjalp meg med å sortere kaoset inni meg, uten å fortelle meg hva jeg burde gjøre. Hun sa tydelig at hun ikke kunne vite hva som var riktig for meg. Det var det bare jeg som visste. Men hun kunne hjelpe meg med å finne det ut” (Brenna 2012, 86).

[On the way home, I thought about how lucky I was to have Vibeke to go to. She helped me to sort through all of the chaos within myself, without telling me what I should do. Early on she explained that she couldn’t know what was right for me. It was only I who knew. But she could help me to find that out].

As Loveleen’s parents don’t understand what she’s going through, Loveleen is thankful for Vibeke, a stand-in Norwegian mother figure, who helps her to find herself – Loveleen as an individual. *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* doesn’t paint the cultured mother as exclusively Norwegian as Loveleen dreams of being like Vibeke.

“Jeg ønsket å være en slik som Vibeke [...] Jeg ønsket å ha tid og overskudd til å lytte til ungdom og mennesker i sårbare situasjoner, hjelpe dem med å sortere tanker, gi dem informasjon om hvor de kunne søke hjelp, hvilken type hjelp de kunne få og hvordan de skulle gå frem. Jeg ønsket å skape samhold i samfunnet og ha fokus på likhetene som bandt oss sammen. Jeg ville gjøre en forskjell” (Brenna 2012, 175).

[I wanted to be just like Vibeke [...] I wanted to have time and energy to listen to youth and people in vulnerable situations, to help them sort through thoughts, to give them information about how they could seek help, which type of help they could get and how they could proceed. I wanted to create unity in society and focus on similarities that bind us together. I wanted to make a difference.]

At the end of the memoir, Loveleen establishes the non-profit Seema, which helps women of immigrant background in Norway navigate the job market. Having benefited from the active role that Vibeke played in her life, Loveleen has now taken on the creative mother role for a number of other women.⁴⁶

The Invasive Influence of the Creative Mother

I have detailed a number of positive examples of the creative mother in Norwegian diaspora literature – Trude, Liv and Rune, an anonymous teacher, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, and Vibeke – but the creative mother can also take his/her influence too far. I categorize this example of the creative mother as invasive, and a character that is therefore problematic. In this final example, the creative mother is an invasive part of diasporic storytelling because she is a co-author, writing the story alongside (or possibly even for) the author of immigrant background. *Bare en datter* (2007) [Just A Daughter] by Sarita Skagnes and Lene Wikander is the story of Skagnes' experiences as "just a daughter" in India and Norway. Skagnes's story is one horrifying sexual assault after another, and even more disturbing is that her perpetrators are mostly family members: an older cousin and his friend, her aunt, and her father. The story highlights Norway's naïveté as Skagnes's father violently abuses Skagnes, her mother, and her two sisters while simultaneously taking advantage of Norway's generous welfare state. After years in Norway, Skagnes fell in love with Jan Ivar and they eventually married. Her marriage and close relationship with Jan Ivar gave Skagnes the strength to break free from her Indian family – and later to write *Bare en datter*, a book Sarita believes to be a story typical of Punjabi daughters.

⁴⁶ I can personally attest to this. Loveleen and I have had a number of meetings where we discussed culture, integration, among many other topics. I also have had the opportunity to tour Seema's office.

When first contacted by Gyldendal (the publisher) with Skagnes's story, Wikander stated that, "Saritas historie er grotesk" [Sarita's story is grotesque] and,

"Det er nærmest ufattelig for en etnisk nordmann at et menneske kan gjennomleve så mye vondt og fortsatt stå oppreist, men Sarita er også norsk. [...] Saritas historie gir oss et unikt innblikk i en del av det norske samfunnet som altfor få av oss vet noe om. Det er mitt håp at vi i denne debatten også vil evne å utvide perspektivet til å angå noe mer enn norsk proteksjonisme. Dette handler først og fremst om menneskeverd" (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 5-6).

[It is nearly unimaginable for an ethnic Norwegian that a human can survive so much pain and still stand upright, but Sarita is also Norwegian. [...] Sarita's story gives us a unique insight into a part of Norwegian society that too few of us know anything about. It is my hope that we, in this debate, will also have the ability to expand the perspective regarding anything more than Norwegian protectionism. This is first and foremost about humanity].

Wikander's comments suggest an interestingly discrepant relationship between ethnic Norwegians and new Norwegians. Assisting Skagnes to find her voice and to share her difficult life story, Wikander directs her fellow countrymen to interact with its growing minority culture. As described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, white authors writing immigrant narratives isn't unheard of in Norway especially if those narratives are expanded to include media stories. An example of a white Norwegian authoring an immigrant narrative is Eva Norderhaug's *Saynab: Min historie* (2004), which is a book version of the Saynab Mohamud's feature on the TV2 program "Rikets tilstand" ["State of the Kingdom"]. As the book jacket claims, "Dette er et ærlig og nådeløst portrett av en innvandrerjente med kniven på strupen, som viser hvordan raseri og blind vold kan forvandles til en innbitt kamp mot kjønnslemlestelse og diskriminering. Alt er fortalt med Saynabs egne ord, ført i pennen av TV2-medarbeider Eva Norderhaug" (Norderhaug 2004). [This is an honest and relentless portrait of an immigrant girl with a knife to her throat, showing how rage and blind violence can be transformed into a fight against female genital mutilation and discrimination. Everything is told in Saynab's own words, put to pen by TV2's

reporter Eva Norderhaug]. However, what makes this narrative different from *Bare en datter* is that the author is forward about their journalistic gaze and does not intervene in the storytelling, it is essentially an extended version of a previous report.

Wikander, on the other hand, is an intrusive co-author who claims to have done extensive research for *Bare en datter*. In fact, it is difficult to know whose voice you're reading – Skagnes's or Wikander's. Wikander frequently interrupts the narrative with facts and statistics throughout Skagnes's story in order to contextualize it for the Norwegian public. For example, Wikander provides these headlines for her ethnographic paragraphs:

- “Av Indias befolkning mangler det 50 millioner kvinner” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 33) [India's population is missing 50 million women]
- ”Sikh-religionen” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 47) [The Sikh religion]
- ”Et medgiftsdrap hvert 93 minutt” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 59) [One dowry death every 93 minutes]
- ”Over halvparten av alle indiske barn blir seksuelt misbrukt” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 73) [Over half of all Indian children are sexually assaulted]
- “14 kvinner drepes av sine ektemenn hver dag” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 85) [14 women are killed by their husbands everyday]
- “Punjab og Ludhiana har færrest kvinner” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 98) [Punjab and Ludhiana have the fewest women]
- ”Dekningen av slåsskampen i norsk massemedier” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 109) [The coverage of the fight in Norwegian mass media]
- ”Over 70 prosent av mishandlede, indiske kvinner forsøker å begå selvmord” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 119) [Over 70 percent of abused Indian women attempt suicide]
- ”To av tre barn blir fysisk mishandlet” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 125) [Two out of three children are physically abused]
- ”Jenter skulle ønske de var født som gutter” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 137) [Girls wish they were born as boys]
- ”19 kvinner drepes hver dag” (Skagnes & Wikander 2007, 147) [19 women are killed each day]

These informative, but disruptive, paragraphs correspond to different aspects of Skagnes's story and serve to emphasize Wikander's assertion that this is not an exceptional story, but instead a common story for Punjabi women. The creative mother in this narrative (Wikander) not only

helps Skagnes be seen and heard, but also emphasizes Norway's moral obligation to act on behalf of women in Skagnes's situation.

Conclusion

Regardless of the magnitude of influence, the trope of the creative mother – an observation inspired by UNICEF Norges “den ene” campaign – exists as a narrative tool to help the second-generation author develop agency, tell their story, and/or to decide their own destiny (UNICEF Norge). Similarities amongst all three categories in this trope are: 1) that the author meets their creative mother by chance, 2) the creative mother helps the author in a time of need, and 3) the creative mother, despite their great variety of influence, all provide tools for the second-generation author to self-actualize – either by motivating the author to untether themselves from the oppressive demands of their home culture and/or inspiring the author to write their story.

The creative mother, in many ways, parallels the folkloric Magical Helper or the Folktale Donor. I conclude my analysis using the language of the folktale and placing the protagonists in the Vladimir Propp-inspired fictional folktale model.

lack(s) → quest → magical opponent + helper/donor → test(s) → reward⁴⁷
 (at childhood home) (out into the wider world) (at new home)

As Ingrid K. Urberg notes in her book chapter “‘Hungry Heroine’ in Norwegian American Fiction,” many Norwegian American migrant narratives “are success stories patterned after Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson’s peasant tales, in which Bjørnson relies heavily on the structure of

⁴⁷ This model is taken from Urberg’s interpretation of Vladimir Propp’s fictional folktale model in her book chapter “‘Hungry Heroine’ in Norwegian American Fiction” (Urberg 2011, 255).

fictional folk or fairy tales” (Urberg 2011, 255). Contemporary diaspora narratives referenced in this chapter similarly yield themselves to the universal and timeless fictional folktale model. Just as folktales incorporate social criticism, so do diaspora narratives demonstrate how their authors challenge both their home culture as well as their host society. These narratives are essentially a protagonist character’s quest from oppression to rebellion that eventually resolves in a reward: Sajjad’s (*Pakkis*) reward is the ability to choose his future; Aden’s (*Min drøm om frihet*) reward is an escape from an unhealthy relationship; Hadia’s (“Fortellingen om Hadia”) reward is a successful career as a Labor Party politician; Amelie’s (*Ulovlig norsk*) reward is the ability to stay in Norway and to eventually become a Norwegian permanent resident; Loveleen’s (*Min annerledeshet, min styrke*) reward is serving in a national leadership position and establishing her own non-profit; and Skagnes’s (*Bare en datter*) reward is a safe life with a respectful Norwegian husband, finding her voice, and sharing her story with the Norwegian public. All of these success stories attribute their triumph, to a lesser or greater degree, to their Magical Helper or Donor (creative mother). According to Vladimir Propp, after the needed assistance from their Magical helpers, the protagonist “feels confident, [s/]he knows what [s/]he wants, and that means [s/]he will reach [her/]his goal” (Propp 2012, 166). Just as Propp observes of the Magical Helper or Donor in folktales, so are creative mothers recognized as integral to the success in diaspora narratives. The moral, or take-away message, of this trope is identical to *Kardemomme* by and “den ene” campaign, that Norwegian society functions best when it includes “outsiders” and takes on the responsibility of helping these “outsiders” to fit in.

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Chapter 4

The Diasporic Nora: The Appropriation of Ibsen's Nora, Norway's Infamous Mother

Introduction

One of Ibsen's most beloved characters, Nora from *Et dukkehjem* (1879) [A Doll's House], leaves her husband and children at the end of the play. Ibsen was not the first Scandinavian to complicate the institution of marriage in fact questioning the institution of marriage was not atypical of 19th century Scandinavian literature.⁴⁸ However, it is Ibsen's theatrical moment that is said to have put gender equality on the map and has also become an exportable symbol of Norway's unique brand of gender equality. Not solely historical, Nora's door "*som slåes ilås*"⁴⁹ continues to be heard around the world today. Using this contextual background, this chapter looks at the third trope: how Nora Helmer, Norway's infamous mother, from Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* is appropriated by authors of contemporary Norwegian diaspora literature. This chapter investigates two explicit references to Nora: first in a memoir by Loveleen Rihel Brenna titled *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012) [My Otherness, My Strength], and secondly in a poem by Masood Munawer titled "Kjæreste" (1988) [Dearest], in order to show that Nora is used as both a source of inspiration as well as a problematic cultural symbol. The chapter also explores less explicit examples of literary appropriation of Ibsen's heroine, a phenomenon common to Norwegian diaspora literature that I've termed "activating

⁴⁸ A few examples: Fredrika Bremer's *Hemmet eller familje-sorger och fröjder* (1839) [*The Home; or family cares and family joys*]; Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's *Det går an* (1839) [*It is Acceptable*]; Camilla Collett's *Amtmannens døttre* (1854-55) [*The District Governor's Daughters*]

⁴⁹ The translation of "*som slåes ilås*" is debated by Ibsen scholars. The stage directions in the most widely used translation by Rick Davis and Brian Johnston reads "the sound of a door slamming shut" (Davis & Johnston 1995, 66). I will use "*som slåes ilås*" or "door slam."

the Nora plot.” Occurring frequently in diaspora literature, activating the Nora plot involves a protagonist character leaves their oppressive family situation in pursuit of individual freedom. This chapter will detail five examples of narratives that activate the Nora plot by the authors Amal Aden, Nasim Karim, Roda Ahmed, and Khalid Hussain. This chapter therefore aims to explore how and why Nora’s door “*som slåes ilås*” is interpreted by contemporary Norwegian diaspora literature.

Nora’s Door Slam Heard around the World

Since her debut in 1879, Nora has been a tool for disseminating Norwegianness. Frode Helland and Julie Holledge emphasize Nora as a locus for national discourse and explain that,

“The young Norwegian nation would use *A Doll’s House* to promote its national value and pride to the rest of the world less than 60 years after its publication says something about the play’s position not only within the field of theatre, but also in the national imaginary. That Ibsen’s play could reach this position was due to its success as a book and as a topic of discussion, but more importantly to its success on the stage. It was disseminated to the people of Norway and Scandinavia through extensive touring while Nora became the most prestigious and sought after role for female performers in the national repertoire. *A Doll’s House* was read, seen, and discussed by ‘everyone’ in Norway during the 1800s and onwards – and from the beginning, was *celebrated*. The data imply that this play was from early on privileged within the field of theatre in Norway, it was close to the dominant pole within this field. This position, which provided access to a lot of (cultural) capital, was attractive to agents within the field. Although the ideas within the play were criticized and ridiculed by many conservatives, virtually no one questioned its importance as a dramatic text. The critics recognised that what they had in their hands was potentially a *modern classic*” (Helland and Holledge 2013, 170, italics in original).

Nora’s marital and self-actualization challenges are integrally tied to Norway’s struggle to become *modern* and to be seen by other Western nations as *modern*. Despite the play’s social critiques, it fits well within its preexisting national narrative. A narrative that, since the time of the Vikings and Icelandic Sagas, touts a tradition of “independent and enlightened farmers

owning their own land,” and celebrates a heritage of strong, independent women (Helland and Holledge 2013, 171). Helland and Holledge go so far as to argue, “At points in Norwegian history, the Nora figure seems to have been directly identified with the nation itself” (Helland and Holledge 2013, 171). This is evident in the success and prolonged (or possibly immortal) life of *Et dukkehjem*.

The play and its infamous protagonist have undergone three historical patterns of performance and are currently in its fourth pattern of performance and/or adaptation.⁵⁰ Pattern one began with its premier in 1879 to pre-WWII, where *Et dukkehjem* was performed and read in its original and through numerous translations throughout Scandinavia, Europe, and even America. During Norwegian occupation in the 1940s, *Et dukkehjem* underwent its second pattern and was performed as a signifier of national resistance. A third pattern appeared, after a post-war respite, in the 1960s and lasted until the 1990s, when the play’s performance and reception exploded with activity, with varying fidelities to Ibsen’s original script. As I mentioned, the play has entered its fourth pattern that parallels international globalizing trends. *Et dukkehjem* has become an international phenomenon. Its international performances and adaptations are now also being funded by the Norwegian state as the “impulse to promote the internationalizing of the text has dominated the past twenty years” (Helland and Holledge 2013, 188). This change in patterned behavior shows a commitment to the promotion and exportation of Norwegian values.

I will provide further detail of this fourth pattern as it is entwined with my literary analysis about how and why Nora and the Nora plot are appropriated by Norwegian diasporic authors. One example of how the door “*som slåes ilås*” continues to be heard today is “Nora’s Sisters,” a series of seminars (2006-10) that took place in India, Egypt, Mozambique, Brazil,

⁵⁰ For visual representation of these phenomena, consult Helland and Holledge’s fascinating maps that illustrate these patterns.

Beijing, Russia, Finland, and Israel and was arranged by the Norwegian Foreign Service (with Norwegian state funding) to stimulate a global discussion about gender equality (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In his opening address at the “Nora’s Sisters” conference at Pontificia Universidade Católica in Rio, Brazil, Kjell-Erik Øie, then Norway’s State Secretary for the Ministry of Children and Equality, stated, “I am sure that the seminar here in Rio will be inspiring for all of us and raise many challenging questions, quite in the spirit of Henrik Ibsen. And hopefully, we will find some answers together on the way to a more gender equal society” (Øie 2008). The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, in his speech at the opening of Ibsenåret 2006 [The Ibsen Year 2006] a Norwegian event in conjunction with “Nora’s Sisters,” concluded

“We hope this exhibition will inspire people to discuss and become engaged in the issues raised: political power, idealism, globalization, gender equality, the freedom of the individual, neglected children, freedom of speech and environmental protection. These are issues that belong at the top of our agenda today. But Ibsen does not resolve them for us. As he said himself, his calling is to ask questions, not to give answers” (Støre 2006).

Additionally, the Crown Prince of Norway, HRH Haakon Magnus, expressed, “the arts unite people across borders and across generations. Times and places may change, but human nature remains essentially the same. And Ibsen’s plays are like that: they capture the immortality of the human soul” (HRH Crown Prince Haakon 2006). As articulated in these three quotes, the “Nora’s Sisters” seminars focused their attention on Ibsen’s method of “asking questions,” specifically regarding gender equality and how Ibsen’s plays have the capacity to unite a common humanity throughout place/location and time. Recent Ibsen scholars have added to this discourse by analyzing Ibsen’s lasting influence. Maren Anderson Johnson uses the lens of genius to account for Ibsen’s cultural and literary influence (Johnson 2014). And Kyle Korynta uses the concept of “aura” as it encompasses “Ibsen’s artistic skills, his success, his legacy as

seen in the Ibsen tradition, and his larger cultural presence still prevalent in Norwegian society and world drama and theater” (Korynta 2016, 154). Nora’s sisters, Ibsenåret, and recent scholarship highlight the universality and lasting influence of Ibsen in today’s society.

“Global Nora” has also become popular in recent Ibsen Studies scholarship. Two of three recent research projects at the Centre for Ibsen Studies at the University of Oslo, “Ibsen in Translation” and “Ibsen Across Cultures,” concentrate on Ibsen’s reception outside of Scandinavia. “Ibsen in Translation” aims to translate 12 of Ibsen’s contemporary dramas into eight languages for a total of 96 translations while “Ibsen Across Cultures” aims to understand how Ibsen’s plays are evaluated, and how the value of Ibsen’s work is “altered, shifted transferred and appropriated, when localized in new cultural contexts” (Centre for Ibsen Studies). Both projects emphasize how Ibsen’s plays have found extraordinary international success. Additionally, recent publications in the field of Ibsen Studies have focused on the reception of Ibsen outside of Scandinavia. *The Relevance of A Doll’s House – Translation and Adaptation* (Nilu 2003), *Ibsen on the Cusp of the 21st Century: Critical Perspectives* (Bjørby et. al. 2005), “Ibsen Intercultural: Nora’s Door Slamming Around the Globe” (Budde 2011), *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities* (Fischer-Lichte et. al. 2011) are of particular significance as they all address the changing currents in Ibsen scholarship, each devoted to the rapid internationalization of Ibsen’s plays as well as space devoted specifically to Nora in a globalized world. Julie Holledge and Frode Helland, director of the Centre for Ibsen Studies at the University of Oslo, have played an instrumental role in tracking Ibsen’s *Et dukkehjem* domestically and abroad. They mapped performances of Ibsen’s *Et dukkehjem* in Norway, Scandinavia, and around the world in a book chapter titled “*A Doll’s House* as National Tradition: Understanding the Construction of Aesthetic Value” (Helland and Holledge 2013) and

in their recent co-authored volume *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Visions* (Holledge et. al. 2016). Helland, in *Ibsen in Practice: Relational Readings of Performance, Cultural Encounters and Power* (Helland 2015), details Ibsen appropriations in local theater traditions in Chile, Iran, and China. All of these works highlight Nora's relevance and reception in a new era, in new locations, and with new audiences/readers.

Nora's international reception is also found in an exciting and unique archive at Nasjonalbiblioteket (National Library of Norway) in Oslo, Norway. Nasjonalbiblioteket has preserved a collection of programs from productions of *Et dukkehjem* that have been performed around the world.⁵¹ The some 100 programs reveal various interpretations and receptions of Nora Helmer. For example, a British program portrays Nora, fragile as porcelain, with a cracked face from her nose to her neck.⁵²



Library Theatre Company: *A Doll's House* (England 2011)

⁵¹ Special thanks to Benedikte Berntzen, Research Librarian in Manuscripts Collections at the National Library of Norway, for introducing me to this creative collection. In addition to her role at the National Library of Norway, Berntzen has a M. Phil. in Ibsen Studies and is an active scholar in the field.

⁵² Image courtesy of HOME and Greater Manchester Arts Centre Ltd

A modern Norwegian adaptation of *Et dukkehjem* illustrates a flirty, silly Nora wearing bright red lipstick with puckered lips, as though in the midst of a kiss.⁵³



Trøndelag Teater: *Et dukkehjem* (Norway 2011)

A German image transports Nora to present time in order to depict her as a mother of three with her hands full of shopping bags, a victim of contemporary culture's overwhelming materialism and exhaustion.⁵⁴

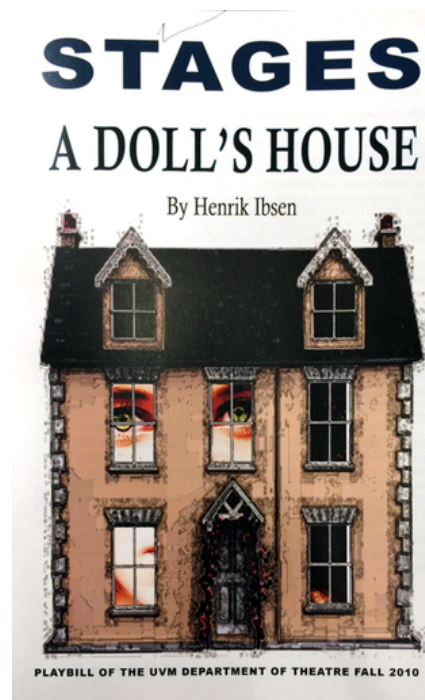
⁵³ Image: GT Nergaard/ Trøndelag Teater: *Et dukkehjem* (Norge 2011)

⁵⁴ Copyright: Bettina Müller



Staatstheater Mainz: *Nora* (Germany 2013)

An American playbill from the University of Vermont's (UVM) Department of Theater's production of *A Doll's House* shows only Nora's face behind the windows of a house, seemingly trapped in her domestic space.⁵⁵



The University of Vermont Department of Theatre: *A Doll's House* (USA 2010)

⁵⁵ Image courtesy of UVM Department of Theatre

A Malawian program places Nora in an African cultural metaphor. In this program, Nora is “breaking the pot,”⁵⁶ or defacing the symbol of female Malawian domesticity, and is visually disgruntled with her position in society.⁵⁷



Nanzikambe Theatre: *Breaking the Pot – Chikondi sikulamula! An adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House by Thoko Kapiri and Karl Hoff* (Malawi 2006)

A program for an original production inspired by Ibsen’s original at Jin Xing Dance Theatre’s (a Chinese modern dance theater) production of *A Doll’s House* shows Nora, dressed in bright red, being supervised by her husband who gazes over her left shoulder.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ This program correlates to the performance “Breaking the Pot” in Blantyre, Malawi (2006) that is analyzed in Holledge, et. al. pp. 129-130.

⁵⁷ Photo courtesy of Nanzikambe Arts

⁵⁸ “A Doll’s House/Hunting for Nora” (China, 2010) – Ibsen International and Jin Xing Dance Theatre



Jin Xing Dance Theatre & Ibsen International: *A Doll's House* (China 2010)

A Danish program for a production of *Et dukkehjem/Noras sønner* [A Doll's House/Nora's Sons] shows Nora in her negligée sitting on the floor indulging in macaroons as her husband towers over her.⁵⁹



Landestheater Detmold: *Nora oder Ein Puppenheim* (Germany 2010)

⁵⁹ Poster for *Et Dukkehjem/Noras sønner* at Aarhus Teater, Denmark, 2010. Photo Lars Horn

Another German image of the production of *Nora: Oder ein Puppenheim* [Nora: Or A Doll's House] depicts Nora as a saucy, bourgeois woman putting on make-up staring confidently into the distance.⁶⁰



These programs complement scholarship by bringing life, color, and visual representations to the concept of the global Nora. They illustrate not only the scattering of Nora around the world and the universality of her character, but they also demonstrate her unique applications in different locations, time periods, and cultures. It is upon these international stages that Nora's door "*som slæes ilås*" of 1879 continues to echo today.

The Nora Plot

Nora is a divisive character in Scandinavian literary criticism. While revered as inspirational to some (Horn 2006) and considered a "liar" by others (Boger 1994), the reception of Nora and the Nora plot is a source of disagreement. It is not my mission to discuss the various

⁶⁰ Image courtesy of Michael Hahn

scholarly interpretations of Nora and the Nora plot, but instead to refer to Ibsen's original text in order to introduce a discussion of how it is appropriated in Norwegian diaspora literature today. According to Toril Moi, Ibsen is, and has always been, "associated with modernization, with modern cultural conflicts, and most particularly with the struggle for women's freedom and equality" and because of this he is "denounced by moralizing conservatives and championed by socialists and feminists" (Moi 2006, 25). I would like to highlight a few short specific references to *Et dukkehjem* that exemplify Ibsen's modern struggle before continuing on to an analysis of their appropriation. These passages appear at the very end of the play, a point where Nora has transitioned from a flirty housewife to the self-actualized woman who has a desire to be recognized as a human being.

NORA

Hvad regner du da for mine helligst pligter?

HELMER

Og det skal jeg behøve at sige dig! Er det ikke pligterne imod din mand og dine børn?

NORA

Jeg har andre ligeså hellige pligter.

HELMER

Det har du ikke. Hvilke pligter skulde *det* være.

NORA

Pligterne imod mig selv.

HELMER

Du er først og fremst hustru og moder.

NORA

Det tror jeg ikke længere på. Jeg tror, at jeg er først og fremst et menneske, jeg, ligesåvel som du, - eller ialfald, at jeg skal forsøge på at bli'e det. Jeg ved nok, at de fleste gir dig ret, Torvald, og at der står noget sligt i bøgerne. Men jeg kan ikke længere lade mig nøje med, hvad de fleste siger og hvad der står i bøgerne. Jeg må selv tænke over de ting og se at få rede på dem" (Ibsen 2005, 370-1).

NORA. And what do you consider to be my most sacred duty?

HELMER. Does it take me to tell you that? Isn't it your duty to your husband and your children?

NORA. I have another duty equally sacred.

HELMER. You have not. What duty might *that* be?

NORA. My duty to myself.

HELMER. First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.

NORA. That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are – or at least I'm going to try to be. I know most people agree with you, Torvald, and that's also what it says in books. But I'm not content any more with what most people say, or with what it says in books. I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear (Ibsen 1961, 282).

The most significant line in this play is Nora's claim to being first and foremost a human being, claiming her marital and maternal duties take second place to her personhood. A radical notion at the time of publication, this continues to be fought in today's struggle for women's rights. As Joan Templeton recognizes, "One could say that *A Doll House* will become dated only when the story of a woman leaving her children makes us yawn with boredom; when women, in other words, like men, are considered people first, then parents" (Templeton 2005, 190-1). Nora desires an identity as an individual (just Nora) detached from her markers of community identity (Fru Helmer, mother, wife, daughter).

Clinging to hope for a resolution, Torvald Helmer pleads with Nora to reconsider and asks how he can provide a solution to her dilemma.

HELMER

Nora, - kan jeg aldrig blive mere end en fremmed for dig?

NORA *tager sin vadsæk*

Ak, Torvald, da måtte det vidunderligste ske. –

HELMER

Nævn mig dette vidunderligste!

NORA

Da måtte både du og jeg forvandle os således at –. Å, Torvald, jeg tror ikke længere på noget vidunderligt.

HELMER

Men jeg vil tro på det. Nævn det! Forvandle os således at -?

NORA

At samliv mellem os kunde bli'e et ægteskab. Farvel. (Ibsen 2005, 378-9)

HELMER. Nora, can I never be anything more to you than a stranger?

NORA. [takes her bag]. Ah, Torvald, only by a miracle of miracles...

HELMER. Name it, this miracle of miracles!

NORA. Both you and I would have to change to the point where... Oh, Torvald, I don't believe in miracles any more.

HELMER. But I *will* believe. Name it! Change to the point where...?

NORA. Where we could make a real marriage of our lives together. Goodbye! (Ibsen 1961, 286)

“Det vidunderlige,” also translated as “the most wonderful thing,”⁶¹ is a societal change that allows women to be seen as equals. I agree with Moi’s assertion that “As long as marriage and motherhood are incompatible with women’s existence as individuals and citizens, Nora will have none of them” (Moi 2006, 247). The institution of marriage must be transformed, in some “vidunderlig” way, to be a union of two free and equal individuals for Nora to be willing to stay with her husband.

Torvald is at a loss and implores his wife to stay with him and their children, but is unable to convince her.

HELMER *sinker ned på en stol ved døren og slår hænderne for ansigtet*
Nora! Nora! (*ser sig om og rejser sig*) Tomt. Hun er her ikke mere. (*et håb skyder op i ham*) Det vidunderligste -?!

Nedefra høres drønnet af en port, som slås ilås. (Ibsen 2005, 379)

HELMER [*sinks down on a chair near the door, and covers his face with his hands*].
Nora! Nora! [*he rises and looks round.*] Empty! She’s gone! [*With sudden hope.*] The miracle of miracles...?

[*The heavy sound of a door being slammed is heard from below.*] (Ibsen 1961, 286)

Ibsen’s door slam is occasionally dismissed as melodrama, however such a critique overshadows the fact that the play actually ends with a question: Torvald Helmer asking “Det vidunderligste - ?” [The most wonderful thing - ?]. This question is not followed by an answer or with any promise of resolution or reconciliation. It “leaves the audience to ask themselves exactly what it will take to make a relationship between a man and a woman into something desirable for both of them” (Moi 2006, 28). Ibsen, ending his play with a question, demands of his audience to ask themselves a question: what will it take for a woman to be seen as an individual, as free and

⁶¹ The translation of “det vidunderlige” is debated.

equal? The authors discussed below all engage with Nora's question and have a desire to be free and equal, however each of them have a unique way of expressing this and, more importantly, all of them define free and equal differently according to their own diasporic locations.

Literary Appropriation of Nora Helmer in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

Nora is such an iconic heroine that she seems to be sewn into Norway's national fabric, traces of her scattered throughout Norwegian culture, arts, and everyday life. Nora has recently become a popular sensation in TV as the character "Noora" on the trendy series *SKAM* (2015-2017) [SHAME] has lead to teenybopper discussion board conversations regarding her similarities/dissimilarities to Ibsen's historical figure (Skam 2015-2017). Thanks to the satirical writing of Lene Hval Fossan at *Aftenposten*, "Nora Helmer" can also be found on Facebook as well as under the handle @lerkefulen on Instagram (Fossan 2017). An area, however, where scholarship and Norwegian society has yet to notice Nora's influence and presence is in Norwegian diaspora literature.

The third trope – appropriating Ibsen's infamous mother – is a combination of the "global Nora" phenomenon found internationally and the continued domestic adaptation of Fru Helmer, as the authors who appropriate this literary figure are migrants or of migratory backgrounds who struggle to identify with a perceived modern Norwegian identity. Placing Nora in a diasporic context is, using George Steiner's theoretical terminology, a "partial transformation," wherein "[t]he verbal signs in the original message or statement are modified by one of a multitude of means or by a combination of means [...] It is quite simply a matrix of culture" (Steiner 1998, 437). This matrix of culture yields many different receptions of Ibsen's Nora in Norwegian

diaspora literature: positive and assimilatory, conflicted and critical, or as a desire for modernity and modern philosophical conceptions of human and women's rights.

The literary appropriation of Ibsen's Nora raises questions of translation, adaptation, and appropriation. First is the question of translating the play, *Et dukkehjem*, from Norwegian into other languages. Second is the reception of the translation of the script or book onto the theater stage. Third concerns how Nora is translated from 1879 to today's context. And lastly the translations of a figure or idea from a Norwegian cultural context to another, in this case a diasporic context. An analysis of Nora's relevance today, international and domestic, would necessitate a large investigation into all of these aspects of translation,⁶² but this chapter focuses on the last two aspects: bringing Nora of 1879 to today's contemporary context as well as the adaptation of a figure or idea from one culture to another.

The theory behind the translation and adaptation of Ibsen is also a source of active scholarly discussion. German scholar Fritz Paul argues that Ibsen and translation are inseparable. He explains how, "Ibsen is the singular, indeed paradoxical case of a monolingual author working in a language understood by only a few million people in Norway and Denmark, who came to a worldwide success exclusively through translation, so that many more people know him through translation than through the original works" (cited in Smidt 2000, 7). Paul neglects Swedish speakers in the few million who can read Ibsen's original, however his evaluation of the significance of Ibsen's success in translation is nonetheless accurate and illustrates why Ibsen's works yield themselves to appropriation. Kristian Smidt, in his book *Ibsen Translated: A Report on English Versions of Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt and A Doll's House*, describes how different

⁶² For an exploration of this, I would recommend consulting *Ibsen Between Cultures* (Helland and Holledge 2016) and *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Visions* (Holledge et. al. 2016).

translations of the play *Et Dukkehjem* have tackled, albeit unsuccessfully in Smidt's opinion, the problem of untranslatability. Ibsen's title, *Et dukkehjem*, is itself a tricky name to translate. Smidt discusses the play's name and clarifies that "the word 'dukkehjem' had made an appearance in literature before, but Ibsen more or less reinvented it for his play. The literal equivalent in English would be 'a doll's home' (or, as Mencken suggests, 'a doll home'), but this may carry associations of nursing home which I think are absent from the Norwegian 'dukkehjem'" (Smidt 2000, 70). The Norwegian word "*dukke*" is also problematic as it can refer to multiple English words, it could mean "doll," "marionette," or "puppet." Smidt argues that *A Doll's House* is firmly established as the English title of *Et dukkehjem*, however the scholars I cite in this very chapter use whichever translation of *Et dukkehjem* they find most appealing or linguistically correct (Smidt 2000, 70). As detailed previously in a footnote, Ibsen's final stage direction of the door "*som slåes ilås*" is a translation issue debated by Ibsen scholars. The door "*som slåes ilås*" at the very end of the play has been translated as both the "door slamming shut" and the "door closing," among others. The translation of this final stage direction is significant as it changes how Nora is depicted at the end of the play and how an English-speaking audience understands her final action. These examples exemplify certain untranslatable aspects integral to Ibsen's famous play and its female protagonist, and they illustrate complications associated with the translation and appropriation of Ibsen's original.

Joan Templeton, in her book chapter "Updating *A Doll House*: Bergman, Ostermeier, Kimmig, and Breuer," discusses the process of "updating" Ibsen, specifically in the debate surrounding staging older classics. Staging parallels this chapter's thesis as it takes the Ibsen of 1879 and presents it to a 21st century audience, or, in her words, "perform[s] considerable surgery on *A Doll House* to make it look young for contemporary audiences" (Templeton 2005,

184). Templeton distinguishes between three different forms for updating: keeping the piece “period,” “transcreation,” and “adaption.” Quoting Inga-Stina Ewbank, Templeton describes transcreation as a “critical term which arose in Indian post-colonial literary criticism” that “describes a ‘creative translation’ which produces ‘a new version of the original work’” (Templeton 2005, 183). She differentiates transcreation from adaptation as “an adaptation, on the other hand, while changing certain features of the work, retains the play’s dialogue, or most of it” (Templeton 2005, 183). These three different attitudes towards staging Ibsen represent different levels of fidelity to the author’s original.

Templeton’s insightful observations are relevant to this discussion as it clarifies why I chose to describe this as literary appropriation as opposed to adaptation. These authors use Nora and the Nora plot as a source of inspiration for their narratives. They do not attempt to recreate or rewrite Ibsen’s play, but instead they use the character Nora, consciously or not, as a type of cultural capital in order to exchange ideas with their Norwegian audience. Ingeborg Kongslien used literary appropriation to discuss ways in which authors of migrant background incorporated tropes, themes, symbols, or intertextual references typical of Scandinavian literary tradition or canonical Scandinavian authors (Kongslien 2013). The term appropriation is often understood in popular discourse solely as a discussion of “cultural appropriation” which has come to be used as a label accusatory of white Western privileged individuals or groups who exploit minority culture in an offensive, racist way.⁶³ Or in post-colonial theory where scholars like David Spurr describe appropriation as a “process ... by which the dominant imperial power incorporates as its own the territory or culture that it surveys and invades” (Spurr 1993, 28). But I would like to explore the term appropriation as a descriptor more synonymous with mingling, cross-

⁶³ For a perceptive discussion of this concept, see Parul Sehgal’s *New York Times Magazine* commentary “Is Cultural Appropriation Always Wrong?”

pollination, or cross-fertilization.⁶⁴ I am invoking literary appropriation, especially in this context, as a way of engaging with the dominant discourse and as a creative tool with the potentiality to create new contexts or cultural understandings. Edvard Beyer explains how *Et dukkehjem*,

”...er ikke bundet til den spesielle, tidsbestemte problematikk, den som Strindberg drev løyer med i *Giftas I*. Dypere sett handler det om noe tidløst og universelt – om kjærlighet og avstand mellom mennesker, om lykke og angst, forventning og desperasjon, drømmen om ’det vidunderlige’ og den bitre, desillusjonerende virkelighet. Og det er alt sammen levendegjort i Nora, en sammensatt og dypt fascinerende skikkelse. (Beyer 1966, 249)

[...is not bound to the special, time specific problem, that which Strindberg made fun of with *Getting Married I*. On a deeper level, it’s about something that is timeless and universal – about love and distance between people, about happiness and angst, anticipation and desperation, the dream of ‘the most wonderful thing’ and the bitter, disillusioned reality. And it is all brought to life in Nora, a complex and deeply fascinating figure.]

Working from this common understanding of Ibsen’s universality, my analysis of the literary appropriation of Nora in Norwegian diaspora literature aims to demonstrate where and how the symbol of Nora is appropriated in these works and also that these authors understand Nora as a symbolic dismissal or disruption of formerly conventional structures of society, cultural expectations, and gender roles.

Loveleen Rihel Brenna’s *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*

⁶⁴ The debate surrounding appropriation and literature is unresolved. Two well-known examples in post-colonial and literary studies of authors who have engaged with this topic are Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Jamaica Kincaid. There is a wealth of scholarship that engages with this debate in much more theoretical depth.

Loveleen Rihel Brenna's memoir, *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*, depicts her struggles of immigration to Norway and her integration experiences in the country. At age 5, Loveleen⁶⁵ moved with her family from India to Kristiansand, Norway (Brenna 2012, 57). Loveleen made her debut in the Norwegian media at age 18 when she participated in a NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) documentary that followed the lives of multicultural youths in Norway. The documentary that introduced the Norwegian public to the young immigrant, and vice versa, paid special attention to Loveleen's arranged marriage to Daljeet Kumar (Kumar 1997, 10).⁶⁶ *Min annerledeshet min styrke*, according to Loveleen, provides an account of an immigrant woman's successful journey to a national leadership position (Loland 2011).

Loveleen has an interest in Norwegian literary history; particularly books that shed light on how Norwegian women lived in the past. She makes this clear in her memoir via multiple intertextual references and lists of inspirational authors, Loveleen read Henrik Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (1897), Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920-22), and Anne Karin Elstad's *Folket på Innhaug* (1976) [The People of Innhaug] because within these pages "Det var som å lese om meg selv, min far, min mor, mine søsken og alle andre jeg kjente med indisk bakgrunn. Jeg kjente meg mer igjen i disse romanene enn i indiske bøker. Bygdedyret i bøkene var det indiske miljøet i mitt liv" (Brenna 2012, 100) [it was like reading about myself, my father, my mother, my siblings and all of the others I knew with Indian background. I felt more alive in these novels than in Indian books. The characters in the books were the Indian environments in my life].⁶⁷ Throughout the memoir,⁶⁸ Loveleen uses Norwegian literature as a bridge between

⁶⁵ I want to clarify my use of the author's first name, Loveleen, in this section. In her memoir she changes last names three times and she has published under all three last names. So to avoid confusion her first name is used in the media and in her own blog.

⁶⁶ In her memoir, Daljeet's character is renamed "Tito"

⁶⁷ All translations are my own unless otherwise cited

her two lived situations, her double identity. She notices that, "Bøkene jeg leste fikk en ny dimensjon. Jeg la mer og mer merke til likhetene mellom den kulturen jeg var en del av og det jeg leste om, som var Norge før i tiden" (Brenna 2012, 131) [the books that I read acquired a new dimension. I noticed with increasing frequency the similarities between the culture I was a part of and those that I read about, those that were Norway in the past].

During Loveleen's self-discovery process, she relies heavily upon works that encourage a breaking away from the traditional and rigid gender roles of Indian women. Most significantly, she describes Nora as an encouraging and motivational character, "Ibsens Nora ble en sterk inspirasjonskilde. Det var som om jeg så henne for meg, der hun kjempet seg frem til en egen identitet" (Brenna 2012, 160) [Ibsen's Nora was a strong source for inspiration. It was like I saw her as me, the way she fought for her own identity]. Loveleen, encouraged by Nora, similarly fought for her own identity by divorcing her husband, going against her parents' wishes, and applying for college. Thus, Nora serves as a catalyst for Loveleen's visibility and for finding her own voice.

After Loveleen's divorce, her traditionalist Indian parents cut off communication with her, as her divorce shamed the honor of the Rihel family. Stepping out of the confining traditional domestic sphere, Loveleen speaks out at conferences and establishes a career writing about and counseling parents on immigrant integration in Norway. However, during this time of self-actualization, Loveleen struggles with the lack of communication with her parents. Loveleen decides to write her parents a letter explaining her actions and intentions as well as detailing the

⁶⁸ Chapter 16 "Jeg tar ordet" [I Take Control] (quotes from Anne Karin Elstad's *Julie* (Brenna 2012 2012, 131-2)); Chapter 17 "Mine nærmeste fiender" [My Closest Enemies] (cites Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Camilla Collett, Sigrid Undset); Chapter 19 "Udstødt" [Outcast]; Chapter 24 "Gandhi og ledelse" [Gandhi and Leadership] (references David Pollock and Thorvald Stoltenberg).

immense respect that she has for her parents. She explains her reasoning for leaving their home, that she “vil ta utdannelse og bli noe” (Brenna 2012, 170) [wants to get an education and become something]. But she also acknowledges the admiration that she has for both of her parents who had to go through tremendous hardships as immigrants in Norway. She respects that her father “har alltid jobbet og slitt” (Brenna 2012, 170) [has always worked and toiled], and that her mother “har jobbet skiftarbeid, holdt huset ryddig, stått på kjøkkenet hver eneste dag og laget mat” (Brenna 2012, 170) [has worked on shift, kept the house clean, stood in the kitchen every single day and prepared food]. However, while still acknowledging the challenges her immigrant parents face, Loveleen admits that ultimately she “vil forandre denne [indiske] kulturen” (Brenna 2012, 171) [wants to change this (Indian) culture] and is at peace with her decision. This letter, a clarification of Loveleen’s intentions and actions, is never sent. Instead, Loveleen takes the letter and “brettet det sammen og la det inni boken *Et dukkehjem*” (Brenna 2012, 172) [folded it and put it inside the book *A Doll’s House*]. Similar to Nora, Loveleen’s reasons for leaving and her actions post departure remain bewildering to her family.

Not long after writing this letter, Loveleen is reconciled with her parents in a moment of crisis. Once they are calmly reunited, her parents encourage her to open up to the idea of pursuing a new husband. The memoir then jumps to the future when Loveleen meets Johnny Brenna, a Norwegian police officer and TV2’s (a Norwegian commercialized television channel) crime expert; they court and eventually marry. Loveleen’s career successfully develops into a national leadership position with FUG (Foreldreutvalget for grunnopplæringen, or the Norwegian version of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)) and she later establishes her own

consulting firm, SEEMA,⁶⁹ where she consults and assists young women of immigrant background as they navigate the Norwegian labor market (Seema). In Loveleen's narrative, Nora symbolizes breaking from the passive traditional roles expected of Indian women in diaspora, what I compared to Rachel Blau DuPlessis's concept of "writing beyond the ending" (Barkve 2018). Loveleen uses this symbol and her memoir to provide an example of a minority woman's journey towards a successful national leadership position.

While Brenna does include inspirational authors and artists from India⁷⁰ (her country of origin) in her memoir, she appropriates Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* and Nora from its original context and interprets it as a contemporary reformist symbol for self-emancipation in diaspora. Loveleen's narrative defies the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern for Indian women because she pursues a life very different from what had previously been decided for her. Loveleen translates Nora through time, language, reception, and cultural context to challenge the options for women in a similar diasporic state. An analysis of Brenna's memoir shows that these overlapping translations of Nora have developed into a unique understanding of Ibsen's original. Loveleen appropriates Nora as a symbolic dismissal of formerly conventional understandings of the role of women in an oppressive patriarchal system. Additionally Loveleen applies Nora to the debate of modernity, or as a type of reformist spirit, within transnational feminist literature.

"Kjæreste" by Masood Munawer

The second explicit reference to Nora that I will discuss is found in Masood Munawer's poem "Kjæreste" ["Dearest"]. Masood Munawer is a poet who writes in Punjabi, Urdu, and

⁶⁹ Seema is her deceased sister's name, it is used as an acronym that stands for: *Selvstendighet, Empowerment, Endring, Mestring og Ambisjon* [Independence, Empowerment, Change, Mastering and Ambition]

⁷⁰ Bollywood films, Film (*Arth*), Books (*De sju åndslovene* and Deepak Chopra)

Norwegian and identifies as a Muslim Pakistani-Norwegian. He resides in Drammen, Norway. Munawer published “Kjæreste” in 1988 in Khalid Salimi’s anthology *Roser i snø: Dikt og tekster av innvandrere i Norge, Sverige og Danmark* [Roses in Snow: Poems and Texts by Immigrants in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark]. Munawer is less recognized than the volume’s editor, who is a well-known anti-racism activist. Salimi has been heavily involved in the Scandinavian culture scene: publishing his own works, writing op-ed pieces, supporting writers, and most recently serving as Chief Editor of *SAMORA Magasin* (previously *Immigranten* [*The Immigrant*]) which is “et uavhengig kulturpolitisk tidsskrift som tar opp forskjellige aspekter ved migrasjon, situasjonene for minoriteter, rasisme og kulturelt mangfold” (Samora 2017). [an independent cultural policy journal that addresses different aspects of migration, the situation of minorities, racism, and cultural diversity]. His involvement in culture is tied to his anti-racism activism, Salimi is the founder of the Antirasistisk Senter [Center Against Racism] and a dedicated fighter for the anti-racism movement. During his time at the Antirasistisk Senter, he described the challenges of the anti-racism movement in Norway,

Racist activities, once limited to clandestine groups, have become the fashion for many today. Popular racist organisations, such as the People’s Movement Against Immigration and Stop Immigration, with its former war veterans as members, recruit both from left and right political parties. What was once a criminal act, for racist groups to appear in public, is now legitimate and to hinder it is called ‘limiting the freedom of speech’. The struggle against racism has been gathering strength through immigrants’ national organisations, youth organisations, the Antirasistisk Senter, SOS Racism’s local branches and spontaneous activities to support the victims of racism as well as to challenge the racists. Regular rallies and mobilisations are common in many cities in Norway. The movement, however, has to ask of itself: how to convey to Norwegian society at large the reality of racism as corrosive of the nation, and the fight against racism as its proper zeitgeist” (Salimi 1991, 114).

I include this citation in order to illustrate the discourse that the poet Masood Munawer engages with in his poem “Kjæreste.” *Roser i snø* is activist literature written by authors from 18 countries about a variety of diasporic themes, such as: second language acquisition, humorous

cultural clashes, race, religion, home, cyclical migration, love, among many other themes. *Roser i snø* was the first publication of its kind in Norway and has been overshadowed in scholarship by the more popular poetry of Bertram Besigye⁷¹ and Hadia Tajik's publication *Svart på hvitt* (Tajik 2001) [Black on White]. The authors of *Roser i snø* overtly engage in a post-colonial argument, as Salimi illustrates in his introduction, "Kolonitiden og årene etterpå har ikke bare utplyndret verden og tråkket ned valmuer og tulipaner. Hele veien har man forsøkt å manipulere kulturene og intellektene til å tjene Vestens egne behov til enhver tid" (Salimi 1988, 9). [The colonial period and the years afterwards have not only plundered the world and trampled poppies and tulips. The entire time people have attempted to manipulate cultures and intellects in order to serve the West's own needs at any time]. The volume confronts Western racism and challenges traditional symbols of Western empowerment; it is an attempt to write against Norway's perceived "White Man's Burden"⁷² mentality (Kipling 1899). It is in this vein that Munawer appropriates Ibsen's Nora, in order to complicate her narrative of modernity.

Munawer invokes Western literary or historical figures in his poem, those being: Ibsen's Nora, the god Loki from Norse mythology and the Icelandic Sagas, and Alexander the Great. He appropriates these famous figures in order to provide a counter narrative to Western success, or the Western path to modernity. "Kjæreste" begins as a hopeful refugee narrative.

For å pynte vår ulykke med ornamenter
emigrerte vi.

Vi søkte tilflukt her slik at solsikken kunne
blomstre i snø.

Vi forlot våre hjemland for å gni

⁷¹ Bertrand Besigye's most popular poetry can be found in the publications: *Og du dør så langsomt at du tror du lever* (Besigye 1993); *Krystallisert sollys* (Besigye 2003); *Svastikastjernen* (Besigye 2004)

⁷² Here I reference Rudyard Kipling's infamous poem "The White Man's Burden"

skjebnen av håndflatene.

Vi flyktet om natten for virkelig å utslette
oss selv. (Munawer 1988, 52).

[To decorate our misfortune with ornaments
we emigrated.

We sought refuge here so the sunflower could
bloom in snow.

We abandoned our homelands to wipe
fate from our palms.

We fled in the night to truly erase
ourselves.]

Similar to many Scandinavian-American immigrant narratives, Munawer begins with a positive message that, through emigration, one finds possibility in tragedy. Words such as “ornamenter” [ornaments] and “blomstre” [bloom] suggest financial opportunity in the West that is unattainable in the unstable source of “ulykke” [misfortune] and “skjebne” [fate], the unnamed homeland. The first person plural pronouns “vi/vår/våre” [we/our] depict this to be a collective struggle as opposed to an individual’s lone journey. The word “utslette” [erase] is a jarring turn from the poem’s previously optimistic tone and signals the beginning of the narrator’s critique of the “regime of goodness.”⁷³

The narrative voice suggests that in order “virkelig å utslette oss selv” [to truly erase ourselves], they must fully assimilate to their host country’s cultural traditions and leave their own traditions behind.

Vi tilba de Nora-aktige jentene og utså oss
dem som våre kvinner.

⁷³ For a recent discussion of the “regime of goodness” see Nina Witoszek’s *The Origins of the “Regime of Goodness”: Remapping the Cultural History of Norway*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2011.

Vi forandret hjertene våre dråpe for dråpe i
havet.

Vi så Loke-liknende tiggere
som vi kalte Alexander den Store og kronet. (Munawer 1988, 52).

[We worshiped the Nora-like girls and we chose
them as our own women.

We changed our hearts drop by drop in
the sea.

We saw beggars in Loki's form
whom we called Alexander the Great and crowned.]

These three stanzas depict a conflicted assimilation process. Abandoning their homeland's notions of traditional gender roles, they embrace Norway's Noras, new and old, striving for equality between the sexes. Slowly letting go of cultural traditions ("hjertene" [hearts]) never to be found again as they're washed into "havet" [the sea]. Judging by the time of this poem's publication and therefore the era of the author's immigration to Norway, it is reasonable to interpret the poem through a Marxist lens, where "tiggere" [beggars] are Norwegian companies or the Norwegian labor market. Upon the discovery of oil in the North Sea, foreign labor was needed to accommodate the country's growing economic development as Norway had too small a labor force. "Workers were needed, yelled the daily ads in the Middle Eastern and other overseas newspapers" (Salimi 1991, 112). Migrants fled to this laissez-faire period of Norwegian immigration policy in order to build up the great Norwegian oil empire ("som vi kalte Alexander den Store og kronet" [whom we called Alexander the Great and crowned]). But economic opportunity took Loki's form, the shape-shifting trickster half god/half giant in Old Norse mythology, and an immigration ban was introduced in 1975 in fear of the influx of non-white immigrants from the Third World. Immigrants who were once welcomed as resources were now seen as a problem and a threat.

“Kjæreste” continues its migration narrative by detailing a painful longing for their homeland complicated by their inability to return.

Vi har utført så mange mirakler.

Vi kom som synkende skip hit
for fortsatt å få flyte.

Vi skulle bare ta en titt inn i paradis.

Snø-lenker er lagt om anklene våre
og vi har håndjern på.
Atskillelsen, dette plagsomme fyrverkeriet
er fanget i vår pust. (Munawer 1988, 52-3).

[We have performed so many miracles.

We came here like sinking ships
to continue to float.

We were only to take a peek into paradise.

Snow-shackles are put around our ankles
and we have handcuffs on.
Separation, that troublesome firework,
is captured in our breath.]

Here, “Kjæreste” describes the migratory journey to Western liberation as the opposite of Nora’s project. Where Loveleen saw Nora as a source of inspiration and flexibility in her diasporic location, “Kjæreste” sees Nora’s “atskillelsen” [separation] from tradition to be an ever-present and irritating battle – a disruption to every moment of their life. Shackled and handcuffed in paradise is the Nora plot in reverse.

Addressing the critique that immigrants are a burden on the welfare state draining Norway of resources that could be better spent; “Kjæreste’s” narrative voice reminds their Norwegian audience of the tragedy that forced them from their homes, that they have fled religious persecution.

Vi ville overnatte og slo
teltene våre opp på brakk land.

Men hjemmene våre ble robbet og butikkene
plyndret av presteskapet.

Vi kom for å bygge et palass av gull.

Vi kom for å tilbringe solbrente formiddager
i velstand. (Munawer 1988, 53).

[We only wanted to spend the night and pitch
our tents on fallow land.

But our homes were robbed and the stores
plundered by the clergy.

We came to build a palace of gold.

We came to spend sunburned mornings
in prosperity.]

Contrasting typical illustrations of disease imagery, the narrator clarifies their initial intention to return. They too disagree with the clergy, the political ruling class, who has destroyed their homes, and they therefore fled. They came not to infect their host country, but to bask and flourish in the promise of capitalism.

Nora in the context of “Kjæreste” is akin to the Nora interpreted by Eldrid Lunden in *Kvifor måtte Nora gå?* (2004) [Why Did Nora Have to Go]. Lunden, contrary to the typical Nora interpretation, argues:

“Nora er blitt sjølve BILDET på kvinna som går og går og aldri kjem til døra. Det einaste som har gått sidan Nora gjekk, er tida. Nora fungerer den dag i dag som den store kildrande identifikasjonsfiguren for kvinner som føler seg snytt og som vil gjere opprør. ... Draumen har vore for dyrebar for dei fleste kvinner. Trykket for stort. ... Men denne heroismen er falsk, og den inneber ein mystifikasjon av kvinna som undertrykt. Dei einaste kvinnene som med hell kan posere i rollen som Nora, er kvinner frå dei privilegerte samfunnslaga. Kvinner som har god bruk for medsøstrenes identifikasjon, og som av ein eller annen merkeleg grunn har råd og tid til å bli ståande der i døra til

dokkeheimen. Poserande i sin eigen undertrykkelse! Billedleg tala: Ullmanninnene⁷⁴ i vår kultur” (Lunden 2004, 193-194).

[Nora has become THE IMAGE of women who go and go and never make it to the door. The only thing that has gone since Nora left is time. Nora functions then as today, as the great original identification figure for women who feel cheated and want to rebel. ... The dream has been too expensive for the majority of women. The pressure too large. ... But her heroism is fake, and it consists of a mystification for the women who are oppressed. The only women who can successfully pose in the role of Nora, are women from the privileged class. Women who have a good use for their fellow sisters’ identification, and who for some strange reason can afford and have the time to keep standing in front of the door of the doll house. Posing in their own oppression! Figuratively speaking: the Ullmann ladies in our culture].

This un-free Nora’s version of ”det vidunderlige” is a modern condition only accessible to upper class, white Norwegian citizens. This post-colonial and Marxist take on Nora Helmer ties Nora to capitalism and colonial legacy, where only the established ruling elites of Norwegian society have access to individual freedom. Munawer in his poem ”Kjæreste” takes the symbol of Nora and reverses her infamous narrative in order to critique ”the regime of goodness” and to highlight a national tradition of racism in Norway.

Activating the Nora Plot in Norwegian Diaspora Literature

The third trope is prevalent in less explicit examples of literary appropriation of Ibsen’s heroine. A phenomenon common to Norwegian diaspora literature that I’ve termed activating the Nora plot appears frequently in Norwegian diaspora literature and this chapter will detail five

⁷⁴ ”Ullmanninnene” could refer to either Vilhelmine Ullmann (1816-1915), Liv Ullmann (1938-), Linn Ullman, or all three. Vilhelmine Ullmann is considered the mother of the Norwegian daycare system (barnehage). Ullmann divorced her husband and was a single mother of five children. Her reputation as an educational visionary was relatively untarnished by her divorce, as she was well connected with the academic and intellectual elite: J.S. Welhaven and Amalie Skram, among others. She was pioneer for women, and known for her spunk, idealism, and intelligence. (https://nbl.snl.no/Vilhelmine_Ullmann) Liv Ullmann is a Norwegian actress with two Oscar nominations, though perhaps better known for being one of Ingmar Bergman’s muses. She is known for her portrayal of Nora in the 1966 production of *A Doll’s House*. (Horn 2006, 94). Linn Ullmann is Liv Ullmann’s daughter, a famous novelist whose quality is debated.

examples of this activation by four authors: Amal Aden, Nasim Karim, Roda Ahmend, and Khalid Hussain. Activating the Nora plot is when a protagonist character leaves their oppressive family situation in pursuit of individualism, as Nora left her family in pursuit of self. This theme is not only prominent in Norwegian diaspora literature, but I have also found it prevalent in works of other transnational women writers or women who write while migrating or in exile.⁷⁵

Before proceeding to narratives that activate the Nora plot, I would like to provide a counter example or the anti-Nora plot. Amal Aden's *Se oss: Bekymringsmelding fra en ung norsksomalisk kvinne* (2008) [See Us: A Concerned Message from a Young Norwegian-Somali Woman] consists of two parts, part 1, titled "Fortellingen om Yasmin" [The Story of Yasmin], which is a story about Yasmin's oppression at the hands of the Somali community in Norway, and part 2, titled "Tanker og meninger" [Thoughts and Opinions], which details the author's own opinions about the Somali community in Norway. Aden tells the story of a bad integration, in her words "Boken er ikke minst en skarp påminnelse til norske myndigheter om hvor dårlig det går med integreringen av mitt folk" (Aden 2008, 11). [The book is not least a sharp reminder to Norwegian authorities about how bad it is with the integration of my people]. Yasmin's story is meant to be a warning to Aden's audience of what can happen if Somali women are denied the ability to activate the Nora plot. Yasmin's coming of age story ends tragically with a marriage to Osman. In Somali tradition, Yasmin is opened for her husband, meaning her stitches from her childhood female genital cutting procedure are cut open to allow for her new husband to collect his marital reward. Afraid of her wedding night, Yasmin confides in a friend, Ubax, only to receive a confirmation of her fate.

⁷⁵ Three English language examples being: *Madras on Rainy Days* by Samina Ali (2004), *A Map of Home* by Randa Jararr (2009), *Lahore with Love: Growing Up with Girlfriends*, *Pakistani Style* by Fawzia Afzal-Khan (2010)

”Du må oppføre deg som en voksen og gift kvinne. Hvis Osman forteller moren din at du er redd og ter deg som et barn, er det du som får straff. Yasmin, du må ikke glemme at vi er fra Somalia, og at vi ikke kan endre på lange tradisjoner. Du er gift med Osman nå, det betyr at han har makt over deg, og at han har ansvaret for det nå, Yasmin. Du kommer ingen vei, du må ikke gjøre det verre for deg selv, du har ikke noe valg, sier Ubax alvorlig.” (Aden 2008, 140)

[You must act like an adult and married woman. If Osman tells your mother that you are scared and are acting like a child, you’re the one that’s going to get punished. Yasmin, you must not forget that we are from Somalia, and that we can’t change long traditions. You are married to Osman now, which means that he has power over you, and that he is responsible for it now, Yasmin. You’re going nowhere, you must not make it worse for yourself, you don’t have a choice, said Ubax seriously].

Yasmin proceeds with her marital obligations, obtains a new identity, and loses her old identity.

”Mamma kommer inn. Tante synger høylytt, alle er glade for at jeg ikke er en jente lenger, nå er jeg en manns kone og en dame” (Aden 2008, 143). [Mama comes in. Auntie singing loudly, everyone is happy that I’m no longer a girl, now I’m a man’s wife and a woman]. No longer a child, and no longer Yasmin, she finds herself in Nora’s dilemma: as only a wife. Yasmin’s narrative ends, not in a door slam asserting independence, but in captivity. The last lines Yasmin gives her reader are bleak, “Mitt liv som barn er over. Fra nå av er jeg voksen, fra nå av er jeg kun kona til Osman” (Aden 2008, 144). [My life as a child is over. From now on, I’m an adult; from now on, I’m only Osman’s wife].

Contrasting her previous book, Aden, in *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009, 2011) [My Dream of Freedom: An Autobiographical Story], proudly provides an example of activating the Nora plot in a narrative that depicts her own life’s struggle to freedom. The title of the autobiography alone invokes Nora. “Freedom” is defined in this narrative as the ability to leave Somali captivity and to integrate into Norwegian culture. “Freedom” is also defined as the ability to wear Western clothes (particularly jeans), to be safe from domestic violence, to be allowed to befriend Norwegians (women *and* men), and the right to divorce.

Aden's narrative, parallel to Nora's, travels from a youth without proper parental guidance to an adulthood under the custody of an oppressive marriage. Having witnessed the egalitarian marriage of her dear friends, Liv and Rune, Aden is empowered to leave her husband, Yassin. "Det er godt å se hvor snille Liv og Rune er mot lille Silje og hverandre, de gjør alt for at hun skal ha det bra. ... Hvis Yassin mener at det ikke ligger i vår kultur å være snille og omsorgsfulle, bestemmer jeg meg for å bli alene med barnet" (Aden 2009, 184). [It's good to see how kind Liv and Rune are to little Silje and to each other; they do everything for her wellbeing. ... If Yassin believes that it's not in our culture to be kind and caring, then I choose to be alone with my child]. Where Nora can only imagine "det vidunderlige," Aden sees a clear example of it in the Scandinavian notion of the "democratic family".⁷⁶ In light of this realization, Aden follows Nora's footsteps and leaves her husband. "Jeg reiser meg fort opp. Det blir stille noen sekunder, og jeg får sagt det eneste jeg har å si: – Jeg vil skilles" (Aden 2009, 187). [I get up quickly. It's quiet for a few seconds, and I say the only thing that I have to say: "I want a divorce"]. After their fight, Aden writes, "Jeg forlater leiligheten" (Aden 2009, 187). [I leave the apartment]. Yassin leaves. But, unlike Nora's story, Osman chases after her once she's left. It is in this violent rage that Aden illustrates the Somali context for women's gender roles in their oppressive marriage.

"'Eier du ikke skam? Ingen mann vil være gift med en kvinne som går i bukse! Det er ingen mann som vil være gift med en kvinne som ikke tar hensyn til sin egen klan!' Han avslutter med å si at jeg ikke fortjener å leve. Yassin er helt svart i øynene. Han tar tak i en tallerken og kaster den i gulvet. Den knuser rett foran bena mine. Jeg er redd. Hjertet banker hurtig, jeg er svimmel og svett. Jeg løper opp til Liv og Rune og forteller hva som har skjedd. 'Du er ikke trygg her', sier de alvorlig. Liv kjører meg til krisesenteret i Tønsberg" (Aden 2009, 187-8).

⁷⁶ For an exploration of the notion of the Scandinavian "democratic family" see: Ahlberg, Jenny, Christine Roman & Simon Duncan. 2008, "Actualizing the 'Democratic Family'? Swedish Policy Rhetoric Versus Family Practices", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Advance Access published on Feb. 26, 2008.

[“Have you no shame? No man wants to be married to a woman who wears pants! There is no man who wants to be married with a woman who doesn’t consider her own clan!” He concluded saying that I didn’t deserve to live. Yassin is completely wild-eyed. He grabs a plate and throws it on the floor. It smashes right in front of my feet. I am scared. My heart beats fast; I’m dizzy and sweaty. I run up to Liv and Rune and tell them what has happened. “You’re not safe here”, they say seriously. Liv drives me to the crisis center in Tønsberg].

Despite Aden’s attempt to leave on her own, Liv’s ride to the krisesenter [crisis center] becomes her door slam. It is only with Norwegian assistance that Aden is freed from her oppressive Somali marriage.

Echoing her tragic final lines in *Se oss*, Aden similarly ends *Min drøm om frihet* with two lines, however this time they are hopeful. “Mitt liv som gift er over. Mitt liv i frihet begynner” (Aden 2009, 188). [My life in marriage is over. My life in freedom begins]. Aden further clarifies her definition of freedom in the “Etterord” [Afterward] and how her success story is integrally tied to her Norwegian location.

“Å være annerledes er ikke lett for en somalisk kvinne. Å være integrert er ikke lett for en somalisk kvinne. Å bli selvstendig er ikke lett for en somalisk kvinne. Å si hva man egentlig mener, er ikke lett for en somalisk kvinne. Her i Norge er det ytringsfrihet, og den har jeg etter beste evne tenkt å benytte meg av. Her i Norge er kvinner og menn like mye verdt, og her har jeg sjansen til å bli respektert for den jeg er” (Aden 2009, 189).

[Being different is not easy for a Somali woman. Being integrated is not easy for a Somali woman. Being independent isn’t easy for a Somali woman. To say what one really means is not easy for a Somali woman. Here in Norway there’s freedom of speech, and that is what I intend to make use of to the best of my ability. Here in Norway women and men are of equal worth, and here I have to chance to be respected for who I am].

Aden implies that she could have never activated the Nora plot without the rights given to her by her modern host nation.

Nasim Karim’s novel *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (1996) [IZZAT: For the Sake of Honor] activates the Nora plot in a similar manner to Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet* however Noreen, *IZZAT*’s protagonist, is Pakistani as opposed to Somali. Karim activates the Nora plot to critique

the Muslim tradition of arranged marriage and also to praise the Norwegian legal system for protecting women so that they can choose their own life paths. Noreen, after being violently forced into a marriage against her will, flees Pakistan to Norway and demands her right to a divorce. In order to divorce, Noreen must accept the grave consequence of her family disowning her. She chooses nonetheless to leave her marriage and her family. ”I dag sitter jeg og venter på postmannen. Han kommer med den skriftlige bekreftelsen på at ekteskapet mitt er erklært ugyldig av norsk rett. Jeg fikk beskjed over telefonen for noen dager siden, men jeg føler ingen glede, ingen triumf. Jeg har vunnet den prinsipielle siden av saken, men tapt så altfor mye av det andre.” (Karim 1996, 141) [Today I sit and wait for the mailman. He comes with the written confirmation that my marriage was declared void by Norwegian law. I got notice over the phone a few days ago, but I feel no joy, no victory. I have won in principle but lost far too much of the other]. Although Noreen has won her independence it comes at a cost. As opposed to Nora, the audience witnesses the effects of Noreen’s door slam. Noreen suggests that it is in actuality more courageous to live beyond the door slam than the initial escape.

”I dag er det snart fire år siden jeg flyktet fra Pakistan og forholdet mellom meg og min familie gikk i stykker. Savnet etter dem er der fortsatt, men jeg lever uten dem selv om jeg aldri ville trodd det var mulig. Jeg har sett familien min gå ut av mitt liv som om det var den enkleste sak i verden, uten at de tilsynelatende har skjenket mine følelser en tanke. Det har ikke vært lett å møte broren min i byen, og se ham gå forbi meg uten et ord som om han ikke vet hvem jeg er. Jeg har opplevd at fetteren min har ropt ’hore’ etter meg på gata. Jeg har stått og sett etter dem, ropt på dem og til slutt grått over at det måtte bli slik. Men jeg valgte en vei der det ikke kunne bli annerledes – jeg ba om retten til å skape min egen fremtid.” (Karim 1996, 141)

[Today it’s almost four years since I fled Pakistan and the relationship between my family and me went to pieces. The sense of loss continues for them, but I live without them even though I never would have thought that that was possible. I’ve seen my family leave my life as though it was the easiest thing in the world, apparently without having given my feelings any thought. It hasn’t been easy to meet my brother in town, and see him walk past me without saying a word as though he didn’t know who I was. I had experienced my cousin yell “whore” at me on the street. I have stood and looked at them,

yelled at them and in the end, cried that it must be this way. But I chose a way where it couldn't be otherwise – I asked for the right to create my own future.]

Breaking traditional feminine conventions is poorly received by Noreen's community and is a constant struggle for her. Although Noreen sees herself as a champion for freedom and the ability to be seen as an equal, Noreen's community sees this as a rejection of their core principles and values. This means that Noreen is now an outsider and that she loses her membership of the community. "Min frihet og fremtid har kostet meg mye. Jeg er 23 år gammel, og har måttet gi opp alt og alle jeg hadde. Jeg har måttet slåss for det som burde være en selvfølge – retten til selv å skape meg et liv" (Karim 1996, 142). [My freedom and future has cost me a lot. I am 23 years old, and have had to give up all that that I had. I had to fight for what should have been obvious – the right for me to create my own life].

Noreen believes her desire for freedom and her wish to decide her own life path to be universal rights, "en selvfølge" [a given]. She has faith in the Norwegian legal system as it not only validates her choice, but also legitimizes it and protects it.

"Men kampen for min identitet er ikke over. Jeg vil ikke huskes som en fallen jente uten moral, men som en jente som greide noe i livet. Jeg vet at mine prinsipper vil bli vanskelige å kjempe for, men noen må jo legge grunnmuren. Hvis jeg legger den første steinen kommer det kanskje flere. Jeg har allerede fått ekteskapet mitt erklært ugyldig av norsk rett. De færreste av oss kommer så langt" (Karim 1996, 143).

[But the fight for my identity isn't over. I will not be remembered as a fallen girl without morals, but as a girl who managed to do something in life. I know that my principles will be difficult to fight for, but someone has to lay the foundation. If I lay the first stone, perhaps there will be more. I have already gotten my marriage declared void by Norwegian law. Few of us have gotten that far.]

This is the most Nora-esque quote of *IZZAT* as it highlights how Noreen is literally the first Muslim woman to accomplish this task in Norwegian literature, just as Nora was the first Christian woman to leave her family. Karim's point being that someone has to start the conversation about women's rights – in this case Muslim women's rights in Norway – no matter

how shocking the conversation may be. Just as Nora asked “Hvad regner du da for mine helligst pligter?” [And what do you consider to be my most sacred duty?], so asks Noreen, “Hva betyr mest – ære eller et liv? Avgjør hva som er rett! Ikke vær med på å skape mer urettferdighet enn den som allerede finnes. Det er ikke verdt det!” (Karim 1996, 143). [What matters most – honor or life? Decide what is right! Do not be part of creating more injustice than what already exists. It’s not worth it]. Noreen pleads with her community to complicate the way that they conceptualize Muslim women, and she will not return until they have accomplished this.

Roda Ahmed’s narrative *Forberedelsen* (2008) [The Preparation] activates the Nora plot, however with a somewhat different purpose than Aden and Karim. Ahmed challenges the Western vs. Eastern notions of the marriage plot. As described in Chapter 2, Zara’s Somali family (specifically her two cultured mothers) organizes for her an arranged marriage to a Somali man. This is highly problematic for Zara as she is in love with Edvard, a Norwegian architect. The novel debates the clashing cultural philosophies of marriage – a marriage based on love vs. a marriage based on family honor. Having decided that Zara will marry a Somali cousin, her family tries to convince her of their traditions. “...Ayeeyo hadde prøvd å overbevise meg om at kjærligheten kom med årene man hadde sammen. Og at de egentlig var en tilfeldighet hvem som ble din ektemann, enten man hadde valgt ham selv eller ikke. Hun mente at hun var et levende bevis på det. Hun elsket bestefar til slutt, fordi han hadde tilgitt henne og tatt henne, selv med den lasten hun bar på” (Ahmed 2008, 160-161) [...Ayeeyo had tried to convince me that love came over the years one has together. And that it really is a coincidence who becomes your husband, whether one chooses them themselves or not. She believed that she was living proof of that. She loved grandpa until the end because he had forgiven her and taken her, even with the burden that she carried]. Zara, already unhappy with her fate, is further disgusted by her arranged

marriage because her chosen partner, Harrir, is undesirable to her. At her grandmother's (Ayeeyo's) funeral she observes him with repulsion,

”Det var tydelig at bildet han hadde sendt, var tatt noen år tidligere. Parfymen hans fikk fluene i taket til å svime av, og de andre fluene som kom inn gjennom vinduet, til å snu så fort de kunne. ... Harrir tok ikke bryet med å reise seg opp, men lente seg fremover og håndhilste i stedet. Han hadde unormalt store nesebor og en høy panne der det sparsomme håret hans ikke begynte før langt bak på hodet. Øynene var pene, daddelformede og kokosbrune” (Ahmed 2008, 162).

[It was evident that the picture he had sent was taken a few years earlier. His perfume made flies in the ceiling pass out and other flies that had flown in to go right back through the window as quickly as they could. ... Harrir didn't take the trouble to get up, but leaned forward and shook hands instead. He had unusually large nostrils and a high forehead where his sparse hairline didn't begin until far back on his head. His eyes were nice, date shaped and coconut brown].

Unconvinced by their pick, Zara's family persists in their pitch. “Far prøvde å lette på trykket ved å fortelle om hvilken bra mann Harrir var, slik en teppeselger gjør når han oppdager at kjøperen har ombestemt seg” (Ahmed 2008, 163). [Father tried to ease the pressure by telling about what a good man Harrir was, just as a carpet salesman does when he discovers that the buyer has changed their mind.]

In accordance with custom, Zara's wedding was scheduled after the funeral. In disbelief that her family, especially her Ayeeyo, wanted to force her to be married against her will, Zara decides “Jeg måtte komme meg vekk” (Ahmed 2008, 163). [I needed to get out]. Zara's door slam is a Eurostar train that helps her to escape her impending wedding. ”Jeg forstår at du ikke kan gjøre det samme som meg, og beundrer deg for at du lar være. Jeg kysser henne på hvert kinn før jeg tar bagen og setter meg på Eurostar-toget til Paris. Hun blir stående urørlig på perrongen idet toget begynte å kjøre.” (Ahmed 2008, 166) [I understand that you can't do the same as me, and admire you for letting it be. I kiss her on each cheek before I take the bag and get on the Eurostar train to Paris. She stays standing motionless on the platform as the train

began to leave]. Zainab, Zara's cousin, is her reluctant accomplice and a contrasting character as she chooses to stay in the community. Zara chooses Paris as her destination because Edvard and she had discussed a trip to the city once before. Paris is Zara's hope for the freedom to choose her life partner, a marriage based on love. She qualifies her decision in a postscript at the end of the novel, "Jeg tenker at hele Ayeeyos liv har vært en rekke tilfældigheter. Hadde hun ikke blitt sett i ørkenen av slektningen som kom ridende forbi, hadde hun ikke blitt giftet bort til bestefar og fått mor. Som igjen fikk meg. Men jeg vil aldri glemme at hun tok seg bryet med å vise meg bildene i håp om at jeg skulle rette opp noen av hennes feil" (Ahmed 2008, 166) [I think that all of Ayeeyo's life has been a series of coincidences. Had kin ridding by not seen her in the wilderness, had she not been married away to grandpa and given birth to mother. Which in turn gave her me. But I will never forget that she took the trouble of showing me the pictures in the hope that I would correct some of her mistakes]. Ayeeyo laid out Zara's future by showing her pictures of available Somali men with the potential to be her husband. Zara sees this as a sign, and makes it her mission to correct the failures of her grandmother. It is her identity as a second-generation Somali-Norwegian that makes this a possibility. Granddaughter and grandma are both victims and victors of circumstance; Ayeeyo was never able decide her fate whereas Zara can free herself from her oppressive situation as Europe allows women to travel without male approval. Ahmed uses the Nora plot, not to critique marriage, but to critique arranged marriages, as Zara simply wants the right to choose. She desires a modern marriage based in love and slams the figurative door on her family in order to pursue this goal.

The previous examples of activating the Nora plot have all been written by female authors and performed by female protagonists. However, is it possible for a male protagonist to activate the Nora plot? If so, in what ways does this activation differ based on gender?

Throughout history Nora has been read as a universal symbol of freedom from societal oppressions. In a famous and often cited speech at the Women's Rights League on May 26, 1898, Ibsen stated,

"I'm not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement. I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of humanity in general" (Ibsen is quoted in translation in Finney 1994, 90)

This speech is used as evidence in some Ibsen scholarship to claim that the playwright, in *Et dukkehjem*, was writing a critique of all mankind and not one that exclusively concerned the "women's question." I agree with Tiina Rosenberg that it is absurd "to pretend that the social category of 'woman' does not exist as a socially subaltern one" and that a gender-blind reading of Ibsen's play is highly problematic (Rosenberg 2011, 91). However, the third trope, in the form of activating the Nora plot, is also found in works by male diasporic authors with male protagonists. In a way, Ibsen's speech speaks truth in that advancing the position of women in society is a benefit to all humans, both women and men; and therefore Nora is not an exclusive source for inspiration. Kahlid Hussain in his debut novel, *Pakkis* activates the Nora plot in order to critique both the Pakistani patriarchy as well as Norwegian racism.

Previous examples of activating the Nora plot in this chapter have shown a female perspective on arranged marriage, but in *Pakkis* a male protagonist, Sajjad, feels similarly oppressed by his family's demands. At age seventeen, Sajjad is at a suitable age to be married and his parents discuss with him an arranged marriage to a Pakistani girl. This infuriates Sajjad,

"En ting var i hvert fall helt sikkert: han ville ikke gifte seg ennå. I hvert fall ikke med ei jente fra Pakistan. Ikke fordi det var noe galt med dem, men han klarte ikke å forestille seg det. Han gift med ei pakistansk jente? Aldri! Forresten kunne han ikke selv bestemme hvem han ville gifte seg med og når? Hvorfor skulle han bli tvunget til å gifte seg med ei

jente han aldri hadde sett? Og hvorfor var det så viktig å gifte seg i en alder av bare sytten-atten år? Han kunne ikke forstå det, men bestemte seg for å vente med å snakke med dem om det. Igjen var det å samle krefter” (Hussain 1986, 100).

“One thing he knew for sure though, he didn’t want to get married yet. At any rate not a girl from Pakistan. Not that there was anything wrong with them, but he couldn’t imagine doing that. Him marrying a Pakistani girl? Never! And besides, why shouldn’t he himself decide who he wanted to marry and when? Why should he be forced to marry a girl he had never seen? And why was it so important to get married at an age of only seventeen or eighteen? He couldn’t understand it, but decided to wait to discuss it with them. Again, he had to gather courage” (Hussain 2013, 66).

After further conversing with his parents about an arranged marriage and a move to Pakistan, the discussion turns into a heated argument and Sajjad storms out of his family’s apartment screaming, “JEG GIFTER MEG MED HVEM JEG VIL OG NÅR JEG VIL UTEN AT DERE TRENGER Å BLANDE DERE I DET!!!” (Hussain 1986, 107) [“I’LL MARRY WHOEVER I WANT AND WHEN I WANT WITHOUT YOU HAVING TO STICK YOUR NOSES INTO IT!!!”] (Hussain 2013, 70). Sajjad’s first door slam attempt fails because, having nowhere to go he falls asleep on a public bench, is picked up by the police and returned to his parents.

Sajjad is not only conflicted by his family’s desire for him to have an arranged marriage, but his dual identity also restricts his freedoms and self-actualization. Sajjad describes feeling helplessly alone, he tells his friend Trude,

“...at han bestandig levde i angst uten at han helt visste hvorfor. At han følte det som om han satt i et fengsel. At han alltid hadde vært isolert. ... Da han skulle hjem en dag fikk han låne ei bok av henne slik at han heller kunne lese i stedet for å tenke så mye. Boka handlet om en indianergutt som ble uvenner med foreldrene sine og reiste bort fra stammen. Han levde i skogen helt, helt alene sammen med tankene sine. For ikke å glemme språket snakket han med seg selv. Sajjad snakket også med seg selv. Inne på rommet sitt. Ofte hadde foreldrene hans lurt på om han ikke var helt bra” (Hussain 1986, 98).

“...that he was always scared without quite knowing why. That he felt as if he were in a prison. That he always felt isolated. ... One day when he was about to go home, she lent him a book so he could read instead of thinking so much. The book was about an Indian boy that had an argument with his parents and left the tribe. He lived in the woods totally alone with his own thoughts. In order not to forget his language, he talked to himself.

Sajjad also talked to himself. In his own room. His parents often wondered if he was ok” (Hussain 2013, 65).

Sajjad’s diasporic identity is expressed as a void of agency in his family life as well as in Norwegian society. He confides in Trude on another occasion, “Jeg vil bli sett på som en nordmann med en annen hudfarge. Det betyr ikke at jeg ikke vil bli sett på som en pakistaner også. For meg er Norge et fengsel. Jeg har sittet i dette fengslet siden jeg var fire. ... En dag kommer dette fengslet til å knekke meg helt. Hvor er hjemmet mitt?” (Hussain 1986, 110-11). [“I want to be looked at as a Norwegian with a different skin color. That doesn’t mean that I don’t want to be considered a Pakistani too. To me Norway is a prison. I’ve been locked up in this prison since I was four. ... One day this prison will totally destroy me. Where is my home?” (Hussain 2013, 72).] Suffering from literal and figurative homelessness, Sajjad must decide if he wants to be liberated from his parents’ strict Pakistani morality or from Norway’s racism. To Sajjad, it is choosing one or the other, Pakistan or Norway, as he leaves no room for negotiation between the two identities.

Returning to his parents’ home, he is shocked to find that his father has had a change of heart. His father explains to him,

“Vi skal ikke tvinge deg til noe som helst. Du skal få det siste ordet i denne saken. Jeg var kanskje litt for aggressiv i går? Men jeg vil ikke at du skal misforstå oss. Jeg og moren din har bestemt oss for at vi reiser til Pakistan resten av sommerferien. Du kan gjøre som du vil. Vi skal ikke tvinge deg til noe som helst, men det ville være fint om du kunne være med. Nadia savner deg. Hun skriver om deg i nesten alle brev. Men jeg liker fremdeles ikke at du motsier meg. Jeg vil ha respekt. Og hvis du ikke har lyst til å bli med oss til Pakistan, må du finne deg en hybel. Du har jo begynt å tjene penger selv” (Hussain 1986, 130).

“We do not want to force you into anything. You will get the last word in the matter. Maybe I was a bit too aggressive yesterday? But I do not want you to misunderstand us. Your mother and I have decided to go to Pakistan for the rest of summer vacation. You can do what you want. We will not force you to do anything at all, but it would be nice if you could join us. Nadia misses you. She writes about you in almost every letter. But I still do not like it when you talk back to me. I want to have respect. And if you don’t

want to come with us to Pakistan, you'll have to find yourself an apartment. You have started to earn money yourself. (Hussain 2013, 86)

His father would rather that Sajjad travels to Pakistan and warns his son about the consequences of staying in Norway, "Norge kommer alltid til å se på deg som en byrde for det hvite samfunnet. Pakistan kommer til å elske deg" (Hussain 1986, 131). ["Norway will always look at you as a burden to the white society. Pakistan will love you" (Hussain 2013, 86).] Sajjad is conflicted between becoming a Norwegian who is economically independent, modern, and decides for himself; or becoming a Pakistani who is respected and valued for their race, religion, and morality. As Ingeborg Kongslien notes, "The text does not include any reflection on the possibility of merging the two into a hybrid or transcultural existence: a third room" (Kongslien 2007, 210). At the crossroads of his big life decision, Sajjad leaves. "Han rusler rolig ut av porten. Ser både oppover gata og nedover. Er ikke sikker på hvilken vei han skal ta. Bestemmer seg til slutt for å gå oppover" (Hussain 1986, 133). ["He strolled calmly out the front gate. Looked up and down the street. Wasn't sure which way he was going to go. Finally decided to go up the street" (Hussain 2013, 88)]. Although the novel never discloses Sajjad's decision, he will eventually leave one of his two prisons. In this example, the difference between women activating the Nora plot versus a man appears to be that men, with access to their own finances, are able to leave their family on good terms as they are expected to self-actualize because self-actualization is normal and accepted for men.

Conclusion

Appropriating Nora on an East/West divide is fraught with problems, as Frode Helland is right to point out in his book *Ibsen in Practice*,

“The Western Ibsen is in no way more advanced in form or reflection, nor is it less political in content. In fact there is no essentially Western way of doing a theatre classic like Ibsen ... The main source of these ideological distortions of reality lies in the very distinction between an essentialised ‘West’ and ‘the rest’, and its implied notion that there is a (more advanced) ‘centre’” (Helland 2015, 6).

In this vein, I would like to sidestep activist scholarship and not advocate for any one reading or literary appropriation of Nora or activating the Nora plot. My stated purpose was to explore how and why Nora’s door “*som slåes ilås*” is interpreted by contemporary Norwegian diaspora literature. Authors use this potent cultural symbol to critique oppressions that impact them as individuals, their communities, and their nations. Their biographical works question freedoms like the institution of marriage, access to education, racism, as well as access to economic stability. What these texts illustrate is a desire and necessity for a breaking with traditional social conventions of their diverse cultures. Authors (Aden, Karim, Ahmed) appropriate Nora to place culture on a hierarchy with Norwegian culture as the progressive and modern, others (Brenna, Hussain) use her as a negotiation point to remedy a split identity, whereas some (Munawer, Salimi) use her to critique colonial oppression. What all of these narratives have in common is that – through the third trope or their literary appropriation of *Et dukkehjem*’s Nora – their protagonists demand to be seen as individuals.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Breaking the Narrative Pattern: Mala Naveen's *Desiland* (2010) and Disidentification

Introduction

I conclude this dissertation by analyzing a novel, *Desiland* (2010) [Desi Land] by Mala Naveen,⁷⁷ which was a major source of inspiration for this current project. It was within Mala Naveen's narrative that I first noticed these narrative patterns in Norwegian diaspora literature and her novel guided my discovery of the presence of this dissertation's three motherhood tropes: the cultured mother, the creative mother, and the appropriation of Ibsen's Nora. Naveen's debut novel *Desiland* picks up on these motherhood tropes from Norwegian diaspora literature and incorporates them thoughtfully and critically into her novel.⁷⁸ Naveen, formerly a journalist for *Aftenposten*, is acutely aware of the debate surrounding "den store norske innvandrerromanen" [the great Norwegian immigrant novel] having written articles and engaged in public debate about the topic (Krøger 2010). In fact, she denies that *Desiland* is the anticipated "store norske innvandrerroman" (Krøger 2010). Her denial appears at first perplexing, however I argue that it has to do with the way in which Mita Mehta, *Desiland*'s protagonist, performs "disidentification" with white Norwegian culture. This concluding chapter will explore Naveen's innovative use of the three motherhood tropes by contrasting them with the previous chapters' findings. It will then conclude by arguing that the protagonist of *Desiland* performs José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentificaiton."

⁷⁷ The journalist/author/blogger also publishes under her hyphenated, married name, Mala Wang-Naveen.

⁷⁸ Naveen is engaged in motherhood debates in Norway as a mother herself but also as the author of *Den globale baby: Det norske surrogateventyret i India* (2013) [The Global Baby: The Norwegian Surrogacy Adventure in India] that discusses Norwegians purchasing Indian surrogates.

***Desiland* (2010) by Mala Naveen**

Desiland follows the lives of the Mehta family, focusing mostly on Mita Mehta, the protagonist daughter and youngest family member. The novel's title, *Desiland*, refers to the family's diasporic location as the word "Desi" is an internationally used demonym that translates to "country" or "homeland" and refers to anyone from the Indian subcontinent or South Asia in diaspora. Shalini Shankar, in an ethnographic study of her time "kickin' it" with Desi teens at three high schools in Silicon Valley, California from 1999-2001, describes the concept thus:

"At first glance, the term *Desi*, the Hindi word for 'countryman,' is simply the newest in a long line of names used to refer to South Asians living outside the Indian Subcontinent. Upon closer examination, however, *Desi* marks the inception of a particular type of diasporic, racially marked, generationally influenced consciousness at the beginning of the millennium. The emergence of the term signals a defining moment in the South Asian diaspora, during which a population that has steadily grown is emerging as a strong public presence. As a new generation of Desi teenagers comes of age, several questions arise: How do meanings of race, class, and immigration contribute to the emergence of this distinctive category? How are Desi teens of different socioeconomic backgrounds positioned in their neighborhoods and schools? In what cultural and linguistic ways is Desi teen culture signified and practiced, and how is it shared across generations? How do all these processes shape what it means to be Desi in different diasporic locations?" (Shankar 2008, 1; italics in original)

The anthropologist explores these questions in her significant and well received study to show that young Desis have constructed identities that refashion stereotypical FOB ("fresh off the boat") identities, and I include them here because of their overlap with Naveen's inquiry into performances of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationalism in Oslo's Desi community (and, to an extent, also in a more general urban immigrant culture). Additionally, both works provide numerous humorous insights into their respective Desi locations and populations. Though I've provided concrete definitions of the term, it is as diverse as the diasporic population it describes. In personal conversations with individuals in Norway and the United States that can technically be defined as Desi, I have encountered mixed acceptance of the nationality adjective. Of those

I've informally questioned, some use the term to describe themselves, whereas others roll their eyes at the term, and there are also those who are completely indifferent to the descriptor's existence. Naveen, however, evokes Desi as a diasporic location that contextualizes the Mehta family in India and Norway simultaneously.

The Mehtas are an immigrant Indian family living in Stovner, a district located north east of Oslo, Norway. Mita is a feisty, independent young woman who, in her coming-of-age storyline, consistently goes against her parents' wishes in order to pursue her own artistic and romantic dreams. Mita succinctly explains the novel's plot, or her home life thus:

"Altså, de er ikke så strenge, men ja ... ting er litt på styr hjemme akkurat nå. Moren min tror hun er sosialarbeider og lar som sagt denne separerte jenta bo hos oss, faren min driver ifølge moren min med et eller annet hemmelig foran datamaskinen hver kveld, og broren min ... han har egentlig rømt til India for å bli rik, mens han egentlig lyver til foreldrene våre. Og jeg? Jeg har tatt en studiepause for å prøve meg som filmskaper, og ... ja, foreldrene mine tror jeg driver dank ... men jeg jobber faktisk med et filmprosjekt." (Naveen 2010, 181)

[Well, they're not so strict, but yeah ... things are a little chaotic at home right now. My mother thinks she's a social worker and lets a separated woman live with us, my father, according to my mother, is doing a secret something-or-another in front of the computer every night, and my brother ... he's actually escaped to India to become rich, while he's actually lying to our parents. And me? I've taken a break from my studies to try to become a filmmaker, and ... yeah, my parents think I'm a slacker ... but I'm actually working on a film project.]⁷⁹

Mita falls in love with a Muslim man from Somalia, a turncoat move for a woman of an Indian Hindu background. Equally as scandalous, Mita quits her studies at Blindern (the University of Oslo's main campus) so that she can make a reality film about her parents' search for the perfect wife for their only son's arranged marriage. However, simultaneous to the Mehta parents' arranged marriage search, is the slow revelation that their (exceptionally handsome) son has no interest in a wife. Their son, Suraj, is instead on a dual mission. First to become a rich

⁷⁹ All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

businessman in Bombay, hoping to establish Bombay's largest and trendiest nightclub. And also to escape from the love of his life, a Norwegian man named Nicki, with whom he had a homosexual relationship that the Mehta parents' Indian values would never tolerate.

The Mehta parents, Bharati (wife, mother) and Shyam (husband, father), are in a marital slump and choose to cope in their own differing ways. Bharati engrosses herself in her "kitty party-gjengen" [kitty party gang] called the Desi Curry Club, a women's group of gossiping Indian expats. She later feels ostracized by the Desi Curry Club as her uncontrollable family becomes the source of their gossip. Whereas Shyam, disenchanted with his job as a physical therapist, loses himself in his new creative hobby, which is a translation project of his favorite Hindi songs to his host language. Naveen's portrayal of the Indian father is fresh and more nuanced than other portrayals as Shyam is emotionally vulnerable, a sensitive creative spirit, and, though distant, a respectful father. A friend of the Mehta family agrees and emphasizes the uniqueness of this character, describing: "Hvor mange voksne indiske menn i Norge tør noe sånt? Det eneste de gjør er å gå på fester og prate om økonomi eller politikk som de uansett ikke gidder å gjøre noe med. Hvor mange drømmer om å bli forfatter eller poet?" (Naveen 2010, 459) [How many adult Indian men in Norway dare to do something like that? The only thing they do is go to parties and talk about economics or politics, which they don't even bother to do anything about. How many dream of becoming an author or a poet?]. The author's sincere inquiry into the immigrant father character, particularly concepts of masculinity and fatherhood in diaspora, is worthy of its own academic study.

The novel's dénouement is utterly confusing. Mita and her mother attempt to resolve their conflicting views of the world, a plot point central to this chapter that will be covered in-depth. Shyam's translation project successfully lands him an invitation to sing on an Indian

reality TV show alongside a Raj Kapoor impersonator and two of Kapoor's family members (his son, Rishi, and niece, Karisma).⁸⁰ Shyam plans to use his airtime to fulfill his dream of being an artist, but to also to use this exposure to find his son who, distressingly, has gone missing. The live broadcast is dramatically interrupted by a terrorist attack on Bombay. The father and son, unable to contact each other because of the chaos of the attack, find each other at a hotel because that was where Shyam and Suraj stayed when they first visited India together. Ultimately, the entire family of four is peacefully reunited at Christmas in their Oslo apartment and they collectively agree to be better at being a unified, supportive family in the future.

Naveen's novel received unenthusiastic reviews from critics and has not obtained much, if any, scholarly attention.⁸¹ Cathrine Krøger's, a *Dagbladet* journalist, remark that the novel was "mye action og null driv fra Mala Naveen" [lots of action and zero drive from Mala Naveen] sums up the novel's critical reception (Krøger 2010). I must concede that, though her narrator is witty and often entertaining, Naveen's novel is not composed of brilliant prose, nor is its plot crisp or easy to follow. The main problem with the novel, in my opinion, is that it just tackles too much. Mita is arguably the main character, but the story allows each family member – mother (Bharati Mehta), father (Shyam Mehta), son (Suraj Mehta), and daughter (Mita Mehta) – equal weight. Because of this ambitious scope, Naveen's project simultaneously wrestles with issues of, for example: race, nationalism, feminism, the meaning of art, aging, LGBTQ, cyclical migration, existential crisis, capitalism, and much more, without fully engaging with each issue of social justice. I agree with Krøger's concluding remark that, "Jeg er fristet til, slik en ofte gjør

⁸⁰ Raj Kapoor, called "the great showman," is an Indian cinema super star. He was an actor, director, and producer who lived from 1924-1988 (Saltz 2012).

⁸¹ At the time of writing, I have not found published scholarly articles analyzing this novel, though I have been told via word of mouth that some Master's theses and Master's reading lists have engaged with *Desiland*. I am also aware that some scholarly publications reference Naveen/Wang-Naveen's published book reviews.

med debutanter, å legge skylden på forlaget som ikke har holdt Naveen i ørene. Men det har muligens ikke vært så lett med dette i overkant frodige skrivetalentet” (Krøger 2010). [I am tempted to blame the publisher who didn’t keep Naveen under control, which often happens with debuting authors. But it may not have been so easy with this luscious writing talent.] This wildness (or “mye action” [lots of action]) could have been tempered had the publisher suggested that the novel be split into a family tetralogy of sorts, where each book of the series focuses on a different family member as opposed to switching characters and plotlines at every chapter. Despite *Desiland*’s flat reception, I believe this novel is important and warrants scholarly attention because it is metacritical of diaspora literature. Naveen engages with her fellow Norwegian diasporic authors by scrutinizing the structure and logic of their narratives and refusing to follow their restrictive pattern. Though the novel follows the lives of each family member, my analysis will focus only on Mita’s relationship with the maternal figures of the cultured mother (her biological mother, Bharati), the creative mother (Norwegian producer Gunn Sande-Berg), and her reference to Nora Helmer of *A Doll’s House*.

Bharati Mehta: The Cultured Mother

Bharati, Mita’s biological mother, is described as a traditional Desi mother, a take on the trope of the cultured mother. Like the cultured mothers of Yasmin, Amal, Noreen, Sara, and Zara detailed in Chapter 2,⁸² Bharati exhibits the specific diasporic traits of a cultured mother: she’s not ethnically Norwegian, she pulls Mita (the protagonist daughter) away from her desired Norwegian enculturation, and she is a mouthpiece of patriarchal values. Bharati is a force that

⁸² *Se oss: En bekymringsmelding fra en ung norsksomalisk kvinne* (Aden 2008); *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (Aden 2009); *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* (Karim, 1996); *Skam* (Bai 2014); *Forberedelsen* (Ahmed 2008)

pulls her second-generation child away from her Norwegianness by forcing “home” cultural traditions on the second-generation child. Chapter 6 of *Desiland*, which details a gathering of the Desi Curry Club, provides insight into Desi women’s culture in Norway and the duties of a Desi mother (Naveen 2010, 38-45). Bharati and her friends drink tea, swap birth stories, and discuss Kiran’s, Bharati’s friend, son’s upcoming wedding. Bharati compares herself to her Indian friends and is jealous of their successes and ashamed that her own family won’t conform to Desi values and life accomplishments.

“Det viste seg at sist Kiran var i India, hadde hun kikket på en jente for den eldste sønnen, Pavan. Bryllupet sto allerede måneden etter, da jenta kom på besøk på turistvisum. Det var forventet at Bharati skulle være i ekstase over dette, selv om hun var den eneste som ikke hadde fått sine barn gift. [...] Nå satt venninnen der med det irriterende forståelsesfulle blikket” (Naveen 2010, 39).

[It just so happened that the last time Kiran was in India, she found a girl for her oldest son, Pavan. The wedding was planned already a month later, when the girl could visit on a tourist visa. It was expected that Bharati should be ecstatic over this news, even though she was the only one of the group who hadn’t managed to get her children married [...] Now her girlfriend sat there with an irritating look of understanding.]

Similar to the cultured mothers described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Bharati and her friends are not only completely obsessed with, but also are upholders of, what is described to as, the oppressively patriarchal societal value of arranged marriage. According to Bharati and her friends at Desi Curry Club, it is through arranged marriage and motherhood that one becomes a real woman and “en god inder” (Naveen 2010, 39) [a good Indian].

This sets the stage for Bharati’s mission throughout the novel, to find her son and daughter the perfect Desi wife and husband. Bharati comments incessantly that “men når barna våre er gift, er våre forpliktelser over!” (Naveen 2010, 246) [but when our children are married, our [maternal] duties are complete!] Upholding the perfect Desi family is Bharati’s duty as a mother and wife. The rest of her family, however, does not adhere to the traditional Desi values.

Gossip, a problem which infects the Desi community, plagues Bharati because, no matter how hard she tries, her family won't listen to her and instead makes anti-Desi life choices. Mita is irritated and feels oppressed by her mother's "ivrige ekteskapsplaner" (Krøger 2010) [eager marriage plans] whereas Bharati is ashamed of her daughter's outspokenness, independence, and sexual promiscuity. This tarnishes Bharati's reputation, which she takes seriously. "De har fått noe å snakke om på vei hjem nå, men de hadde nok å snakke om fra før av, tender jeg! Datter som ikke eier respekt, mann som har mistet jobben, og i stedet for egne barnebarn passer jeg på en venninnes barnebarn... ja, du vet, det er ingen A4-familie jeg har" (Naveen 2010, 340). [They had gotten something to talk about now on their way home, but they had enough to talk about from before, I can imagine! A daughter that doesn't have respect, husband who has lost his job, and in place of my own grandchildren I'm taking care of a girlfriend's grandchildren...yeah, you know, it is no *Leave It to Beaver*⁸³ family I have.] Similar to other cultured mothers, Bharati is deeply concerned about the honor, or lack thereof, of her family. Her opinions illustrate the contrasts between "honor cultures" of the East and the "post-honor culture" of the West. However, Naveen's narrative veers from the dystopian memories of her authorial counterparts (Amal Aden, Roda Ahmed, Mina Bai, and Nasim Karim). Naveen flips the script on the typical *ærefortelling* [honor narrative] by showing Bharati's ability to adapt to and accept her family's alternative lifestyles and because of this, Mita, the second-generation daughter, does not leave her family.

⁸³ Norwegians use the term "A4 familie" or "A4-livet," which I've translated to "*Leave it to Beaver* family," to refer to a normal family. A normal family is often understood to be: two married parents, each with stable employment, 1-3 children, a house, and a family pet. Similar to the American debate, however, A4 is more often than not a descriptor of a nonexistent familial idyll.

Bharati and Mita reconcile their differences late in the narrative, in Chapter 52, as Bharati realizes that if she wants to be in her daughter's life, she has to be more understanding of her daughter's world (Naveen 2010, 376-83). Bharati, realizing that her strictness and rigid traditional values are in large part to blame for her family's unhappiness, decides to connect with Mita on her level by joining her daughter in a night of drinking at Stargate, Mita's favorite dive bar in Grønland.⁸⁴ Over many glasses of whiskey, Bharati confides in Mita her own problems growing up under the restrictions of a strict cultured mother.

“Det var kanskje ikke alltid meningen, men hun var en bedre bestemor for deg enn hun var en mor for meg. For sånn oppdro de gjerne jenter på den tiden. Jo dummere vi var, desto bedre, for da fikk vi ikke griller i hodet. Vi stakk ikke av med gutter. Brakte aldri skam over familien. Og for å unngå at vi fikk dårlige venner, var det best ikke å ha venner i det hele tatt, sa de. På den måten fikk du en hel generasjon med kvinner som ikke hadde tilgang til informasjon om menn eller sex, og derfor opplevde sin første natt med ektemannen nærmest som en voldtekt. Og sånn er det med menn som oppdrar kvinner, de forsikrer seg om at kvinnene mener det samme” (Naveen 2010, 380).

[Maybe it wasn't always her intention but she was a better grandma to you than she was a mother to me. Because that's just how they raised girls back in the day. The dumber we were, the better, because then we wouldn't get any crazy ideas. We didn't run away with boys. Never brought shame to the family. And to ensure that we didn't make any bad friends, it was best not to have friends at all, they said. Because of that you got a whole generation of women who didn't have access to information about men or sex, and therefore they experience their wedding night akin to rape. And that's how it is when men raise women; they make sure that women believe the same.]

Bharati explains her own version of dystopian memory, where she was restricted from thriving as an individual at the cost of upholding her family's honor. This confessional conversation shocks Mita, who thinks the whole thing is “helt forjævlig merkelig” (Naveen 2010, 379) [totally fucking strange]. Their conversation is cut short by the arrival of Mita's friends, Vicky and Abdi, but Bharati parties with the young group through the night and into morning, embracing the

⁸⁴ Stargate is an actual bar/nightclub in Grønland, known for its affordability. Grønland is a neighborhood of Oslo known for its diversity, particularly catering to the city's Middle Eastern and Asian immigrant population.

disoriented life of her “skikkelig crazy datter” (Naveen 2010, 383) [totally crazy daughter]. Such a change of heart is not found in other Norwegian diaspora narratives, where instead mothers force their daughters into marriage or daughters escape their families because they fear for their safety and/or lives. Therefore Bharati’s willingness to change shows both a clean break from and also a critique of the trope of the cultured mother.

Bharati also differs significantly from the trope of the cultured mother in that she harbors a shameful secret of her own. Contrasting the cultured mothers of other works where the cultured mother is portrayed as a pious, unyielding upholder of patriarchal values, Bharati’s worry about how her daughter’s promiscuity could influence her marriage potential is based on personal experience. The Desi mother had a premarital affair with an older man that she has kept secret from her husband for the entirety of their marriage, and Shyam learns of this affair from Bharati’s family while he’s in Bombay.

’Det var da familien måtte skynde seg,’ sa Shaan lavt og senket hodet som om han var skamfull over den gamle som ikke hadde hatt kontroll over sine lyster, ’før ryktene begynte å gå. Så derfor gikk de til vår Mataji, og tagg om din hånd til sin datter. Det er jo en dyd, min bror, at man har kontroll over sinn og kropp, hæ? Man kan alltid, som de gamle sier, ta en kald dusj.’
 ’Så, derfor...’ Han kjente seg forvirret, og hørte seg selv stille et spørsmål han egentlig ikke brydde seg om å få svaret på. ’Hvem var mannen?’
 ’Det var en gamling som bodde i nabolaget, en de kalte Nirmal Babu. En gammel enkemann, jeg tror han hadde pianoundervisning for de litt mer velstående barna i nabolaget, men de forsvant da han begynte å snike seg over rosebuskene til masi, kan du si,’ fniste Pinky, før hun tok seg sammen. ’Jeg tror de hadde begynt å snakke sammen på markedet, sikkert funnet ut at de satt ensomme på hver sin side av gata. Det var ikke noe galt i det, bhaisaab, men du vet, folk gjorde narr av dem, lagde vitser om disse to som plutselig plantet blomster og gikk turer sammen som om de skulle være noen ungfoler. De slengte spydigheter om at ’også tørre kvister kan blomstre igjen’, eller ’se, det regner i ørkenen’...’

’Bharati har aldri fortalt meg dette,’ sa Shyam mutt.

’Vel, da hadde du kanskje ikke giftet deg med henne, pape,’ brøt broren inn.”
 (Naveen 2010, 448).

[“That’s when the family had to hurry,” said Saan quietly and lowered his head as though he was ashamed of a past that didn’t have control over its desires, “before the

rumors began to fly. So they therefore went to our *Mataji*⁸⁵, and asked of your hand for their daughter. It is of course a virtue, my brother, that you have control over mind and body, huh? One can always, as the elderly say, take a cold shower.”

“So, therefore...” He felt confused, and heard himself ask a question he actually didn’t care to know the answer to. “Who was the man?”

“It was an old man who lived in the neighborhood, one called Nirmal Babu. An old widower, I think he taught piano for the more affluent children in the neighborhood, but they disappeared when he began to sneak over *masi*’s⁸⁶ rose bushes, as they say.”

Pinky snickered before she pulled herself together again. “I think they began their relationship chatting at the market, where they likely found out that they were both lonely on their respective sides of the street. There wasn’t anything wrong with it, *bhaisaab*,⁸⁷ as you know, but people began to make fun of them, made jokes about the two who suddenly started planting flowers and going on walks together as though they were spring chickens. They would make sarcastic remarks, like ‘dry dams can blossom again’ or ‘see it rains in the dessert’...”

“Bharati has never told me this,” said Shyam sullenly.

“Well, then you probably wouldn’t have married her, *pape*.” Interrupted the brother.]

Shyam learns that his wife was in a relationship with an older man in her neighborhood and that Shyam was chosen to be her husband in order to avoid rumors. This is hurtful for two reasons, the first being that he didn’t marry a virgin as he had thought and the second being that he may not have been an initial top choice of a husband for Bharati. This news is clearly shocking to Shyam, a deep betrayal to the fabric of the couple’s arranged marriage. A revelation of this magnitude is grounds for divorce and, according to many of other Norwegian diasporic narratives, grounds for strict punishment. Instead, the Mehta couple decides to work through their marital conflict and take responsibility for their respective failings as a spouse.

Gunn Sande-Berg: The Creative Mother

Mita, an aspiring filmmaker, encounters the Norwegian producer Gunn Sande-Berg, a fictional character who serves as the creative mother trope. Gunn hires Mita to film a piece on

⁸⁵ “Mataji” is a Hindi word that means respected mother.

⁸⁶ “Masi” is the Hindi word meaning mother’s sister, or maternal aunt.

⁸⁷ “Bhaisaab” is the Hindi word meaning respected brother.

her parents' search for a Desi fiancé for her brother's arranged marriage. Of the creative mother categories – fictional characters, encouraging friends, academics, and co-authors – Gunn is a combination of a fictional character and encouraging friend, but more of a fictional encouraging employer. Mita's response to Gunn's presence as a creative mother moves through the stages of passive influence to active influence and ultimately Mita perceives Gunn to have an invasive influence on her diasporic storytelling.

In Gunn, Naveen provides a description of Norwegian whiteness as she contrasts Gunn with Mita's mother. As bell hooks points out, much to the surprise of white people, "black people watch white people with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze [...]" (bell hooks 1992, 338). Gunn, with her inherited gender-equal hyphenated surname, is "en av landets flinkeste regissører gjennom tidene" (Naveen 2010, 176) [one of the country's brightest directors of all time] and is described as essentially a stereotype of the successful businessman: always drinking whiskey, single her whole life as committed relationships never suited her ("Ekteskapet er en konstruksjon jeg ikke tror på" (Naveen 2010, 179) [Marriage is a construction I don't believe in]), but freely explores plenty of sexual partners – a Norwegian woman who has transcended her own gender. Gunn is also described as attractive and fit, with good, clear skin and strong muscles. Her residence is described in opposition to Mita's parents' place:

"På en matt messingplakett sto navnet hennes i svarte, inngraverte bokstaver: Gunn Sande-Berg. Sånne dørsilt, fantes de bare på denne siden av byen, tenkte Mita. Foreldrenes dørsilt var en smal plastlaminert stripe ingen på denne siden av Majorstua hadde sånne billige skilt. Gjennom glasset i Gunns dør kunne hun ane konturene av møblene i en sparsommelig opplyst entré" (Naveen 2010, 175).

[Her name was engraved in black on a matte plaque: Gunn Sande-Berg. Such a doorplate was found only on this side of town, thought Mita. Her parent's doorplate was a narrow plastic laminated strip; no one on this side of Majorstua would have that kind of a cheap doorplate. Through the glass in Gunn's front door, she could see the contours of furniture in a sparsely lit entrance.]

Similar to Loveleen and Vibeke's relationship, the material culture of the creative mother's residence is of particular importance as it contrasts the Indianness of their parents' homes.

Vibeke's home is depicted as *koselig* [cozy] but also elegant, and Gunn's home similarly reflects her role as an advisor (Jarlsbo 2009). Gunn's house is artistic, elegant, and impressively intimidating.

“De endte i et rom hvor tre av veggene var tapetsert med bøker fra gulv til tak, her og der avbrutt av en plante eller en moasikkvase. På den siste veggen hang det et par litografier, en innrammet filmplakat fra Gunns egen klassiker *Fru Marg* og et maleri av en lubben, naken dame. Stua var liten, men overalt hersket et slags ryddig kaos av fargerik kunst, støvete antikviteter, sværere vaser og sølvlysestaker med lange dråper av stivnet stearin” (Naveen 2010, 176).

[They ended in a room where three of the walls were covered in books from floor to ceiling, interrupted occasionally by a plant or a mosaic vase. On the last wall hung a couple of lithographs, a framed movie poster from Gunn's own classic *Fru Marg* and a painting of a chubby naked woman. The living room was small, but there was an overall aesthetic of tidy, colorful, artful chaos; dusty antiques, large vases, and silver candlesticks with long drops of stiff stearin.]

Both locations inspire the protagonist female to be more like their creative mother. Where Loveleen was inspired to counsel and comfort other women of immigrant background in the Norwegian labor market, Mita is inspired to be a great artist. “I Gunns stue fikk hun ikke bare lyst til å være flink, men til å ruve, bli stor – den største filmskaperen ever! Men selv om Mita følte seg både uunnværlig og ambisiøs fordi *de* hadde ringt *henne*, var det usikkerheten som satt sterkest i henne” (Naveen 2010, 181, italics in original). [In Gunn's living room, she not only wanted to be good, but imposing, big – the greatest filmmaker ever! But even though Mita felt both indispensable and ambitious because *they* had called *her*, there was an uncertainty that sat deep inside her.] Though lacking some confidence accredited to a bit of imposter syndrome, Mita is motivated by Gunn to untether herself from her cultural situation and to film her story.

Gunn agrees to fund Mita's "kvasidokumentar" (Naveen 2010, 184) [quasi documentary] about "foreldre med identitetskrise" [parents with an identity crisis] for 150,000 NOK, which Gunn sees as an opportunity to portray immigrants in ways other than "forviklingskomedier og gangsterdramaer" [coming-of-age comedies and gangster dramas] (Naveen 2010, 180). However Mita slowly realizes that Gunn expects Mita to make an exploitative exposé about growing up as an oppressed girl in an Indian household. Mita struggles greatly with the realization that Gunn considers her to be an immigrant filmmaker who ought to narrate immigrant issues as opposed to the great filmmaker, detached from ethnicity, which Mita aspires to be. Mita, in her ever-colorful language, describes this realization:

"Nå trodde vel Gunn Sande-Berg at foreldrene var neandertalere som planla å kidnappe henne og gifte henne bort til en landsbyidiot, slik at de eneste filmene Mita Mehta kunne lage i ettertid – hvis hun klarte å rømme fra en hytte bygget av kudritt – ville ha titler som "Ikke uten min verdighet". Hun måtte forklare at foreldrene var helt normale mennesker, fortelle om broren som alltid sto ved hennes side som en beskyttende helgen" (Naveen 2010, 179).

[Now Gunn probably thought that her parents were Neanderthals whose plan was to kidnap her and marry her off to a village idiot, so that the only film Mita Mehta would make would be in hindsight – if she managed to escape from a cabin built of cow shit – which would have a title like "Not Without my Dignity." She had to explain that her parents were totally normal humans, told about her brother who always stood by her side like a guardian angel.]

Here Mita highlights the orientalizing, exoticizing, and fetishizing made of the "Other woman" in Norwegian art and society. Mita further explains that, "Jeg får følelsen at Gunn egentlig skulle ønske at jeg var en pakistansk eller somalisk lidende jente som øste ut banale historier om tvangsekteskap og omskjæring" (Naveen 2010. 334-5). [I get the feeling that Gunn actually wishes that I were a Pakistani or Somali suffering girl who spewed banal stories about forced marriages and female genital mutilation.] Mita later comes to the realization that Gunn "wishes" she was a Pakistani or Somali woman in peril as their stories are profitable and popular, Gunn,

Mita's creative mother, is driven by capitalism and profit. Mita argues here that the typical Norwegian news documentary, or possibly more broadly all Norwegian diaspora narratives, is made for the inclination of the white spectator. Illustrating this point is the fact that male immigrants in these works are portrayed as one-dimensionally violent and patriarchal, and then punished for their non-white cultural alliances. In order to write Mita's family's "real" life story, the young filmmaker needs to challenge the contemporary Norwegian narrative of identity formation, as the contemporary narrative does not account for intersectionality and complications of the topics of race, class, sexuality, and gender.

This consciousness comes to a head during Mita's night out drinking with her mother, Bharati, and friends, Vicky and Abdi. After a number of whiskey shots, Mita, in a drunken rage, throws all the film advance money and her video camera into the river from a bridge. As she does this, she screams,

"Jeg er fri. Fri fra de råtne pengene og det de dikterte meg til å gjøre. Fri fra et jævla slaveprosjekt! [...] Det er skitne penger, det er penger som skulle skape kunst de kunne le av. Akkurat som de sitter og hånler ... og ... stakkarsliggjør, eller bagatelliserer hver eneste kunstner som ikke er norsk i dette landet. Dere vet det selv! Vi kommer alltid til å være objekter for dem, som de kan synes synd på! [...] Takk, din dumme, selvhøytidelige fitte!" (Naveen 2010, 416-7).

[I am free. Free from the rotten money and what they dictated me to do. Free from a fucking slavery project [...] It's dirty money, it's money that was meant to create art they [Norwegians] could laugh at. Just as they sit there and cackle ... and ... pity, or belittle every artist that isn't Norwegian in this country. You all know it your selves! We will always be objects for them, so that they can feel sorry for us! [...] Thank you, you dumb, self-important cunt!]

This scene is a metacommentary on the politics of marginalized narratives. In this scene Naveen directly engages with her readers' – what Jill Dolan calls "audiences as participatory publics" – understanding of how Mita (and possibly Naveen, the author and journalist, as well) is

uncomfortably situated in the Norwegian discourse of minority subjectivity (Dolan 2005, 10).

How is Mita to identify as the hybrid character that she is if there is no precedent?

Naveen is critical of her fellow diasporic authors and their willingness to assimilate to both societal and narrative conventions. This is a *call for acknowledgement*,⁸⁸ or what Christine L. Garlow, a performance theorist and folklorist, describes as a performer's "asking for more than mere tolerance or simple recognition," it is Naveen's "weav[ing] together personal testimony [...] in inventive ways, with the hope of generating concern, care, and compassion among her audience" (Garlow 2013, 4). This scene is an invitation to the creative mothers of Norway to reflect on their role in minority subjugation and to not only think critically about the dilemma of Desi women in Norway but to also act differently toward Desi women in Norway.

Garlow further describes "acknowledgment" as embracing

"both humanity's vulnerability and strength as individuals to address that fragility. In acknowledgment, there is the potential for healing and hope essential to communal spirit, social activism, and the moral well-being of humankind. Conversely, a lack of acknowledgment is a fundamental precondition for suffering. The result is often a social state of being marginalized, ignored, or forgotten" (Garlow 2013, 21).

This combination of metacommentary and performative writing "opens her audience to witness the challenges of diasporic life for those who are made to feel less than welcome while participating in the public sphere" (Garlow 2013, 5). The critical portrayal of the creative mother is a way of reaching out to the Norwegian public in order to get them to understand an artistic need, which is a breaking of the Desi character trope. Naveen does this with the aim that the audience response to this need (or *call for acknowledgement*) would be with both empathy and acknowledgment.

⁸⁸ I borrow this phrase *call for acknowledgement* (italics in the original) from Christine L. Garlow's chapter titled "Toward Acknowledgment: Care in Diasporic Performances" of her book *Desi Divas: Political Activism in South Asian American Cultural Performances* where she details Shyamala Moorthy's performance *Rise* in Madison, Wisconsin in 2005.

“Ibsenske Noraer” [Ibsenesque Noras]: The Appropriation of Ibsen’s Nora Helmer

As I discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Nora Helmer has been used as a tool for disseminating Norwegianness and Norwegian values of gender equity beyond Norway’s boundaries, often referred to as the “Global Nora.” I expanded upon that argument to illustrate that Nora is similarly used within Norway’s borders to promote these same notions of gender equality within the country’s culturally different (Eastern) immigrant populations. Nora’s door slam (*som slåes ilås*) is widely understood and accepted to be *the* theatrical moment that most celebrates women’s liberation from oppressive societal traditions. In her novel, Naveen disrupts and exposes the framework of Nora-worship, as she sees it to be narrow-minded and prejudiced. *Desiland* provides both 1) an explicit reference to Nora Helmer of Henrik Ibsen’s *Et dukkehjem* and, in doing so, 2) the novel also criticizes the phenomenon of “activating the Nora plot” found in other diasporic works in Norway. Most comparable to Masood Munawer’s poem “Kjæreste” (1988) [Dearest], Naveen’s narrative is critical of the parallels drawn between the Nora figure and immigrant women from Eastern cultures residing in Norway.

After a painful hangover caused by a generous number of Stargate’s whiskey pours and some time to reflect, Mita confides in her friend Karishma. Karishma is Mita’s peer, of the same age and Indian heritage; she coincidentally is also Bharati’s choice wife for her only son. Mita tells Karishma of her decision to change directions in her film project in order to expose Gunn and Adrian, Gunn’s assistant, as profit-driven exploiters.

“Karishma lyttet til Mitas plan om å bruke filmen som en utforskning av problemet med å lage film på bestilling. De ville forbli bakstreverske andreklassesmennsker om de ikke fremsto som det de var, ’ibsenke Noraer’ – fulle av faen!” (Naveen 2010, 458).

[Karishma listened to Mita's plan to use the film as an exploration of the problem of making films on commission. They would remain backwards, second-class people if they didn't present themselves as though they were 'Ibsen's Noras' – full of shit!]

Mita alludes to Norway's most famous mother and independent woman, Nora, and implies that the only way that migrant artists, or any migrants for that matter, are to be accepted in Norway is conditional of them appropriating Nora and slamming the door on their culture and family. Mita condemns what Terje Tvedt in his book *Utviklingshjelp, utenrikspolitikk og makt* [Development Aid, Foreign Policy, and Power] labels “Et nasjonalt godhetsregime” (Tvedt 2003, 33) [a national regime of goodness], a concept which has garnered significant scholarly acceptance and also generated much debate in Norway. Tvedt argues that “Begrepet godhetsregime defineres her som et dominant normlegitimerende og normproduserende regime hvor forestillinger og retorikk om godhet regulerer systeminterne relasjoner og gir systemets det grunnleggende eksterne legitimitet” (Tvedt 2003, 34). [The concept of the regime of goodness is defined here as a dominant, norm-legitimizing, and norm-producing regime where ideas and rhetoric of goodness govern systematic relationships and give the system its basic external legitimacy]. The *godhetsregime* describes how official Norwegian foreign policy strives to fight for universal rights, particularly in the Global South, under the pretense of goodness, whereas in reality it is a way for the state to exert its soft power and spread Norwegianness. Mita finds herself in the Catch 22 of the *godhetsregime*, either conform to Norwegian values and abandon your family or embrace your heritage and lack recognition from Norwegian society.

Another way in which *Desiland* breaks with the trope of appropriating Ibsen's Nora is that Naveen refuses any of her characters the opportunity to “activate the Nora plot.” Though there are a number of young Indian-Norwegian women introduced in the novel, only two are central to the novel's marriage plot, or arranged marriage plot: Mita and Karishma. Bharati

consistently worries about Mita's marriage prospects, but she had also planned that Karishma would marry her son before she knew of his plans to go to India and that he was homosexual. The two characters bond over the pressures of their prospective marriages and develop an intimate friendship.

Mita discusses with Karishma her new idea of flipping-the-script and secretly filming Adrian's (Gunn's assistant) interactions with Bharati in order to expose Gunn's production company for being hypocritical capitalist racists. Karishma listens intently but the conversation then turns to the young women's differing views of love and marriage.

'Og det gjør du ved å smugfilme Adrian? Eller kaste penger fra en bro?'

'Det er symbolikk.'

'Mita, jeg tror jeg må melde pass når det gjelder filmingen.'

Venninnes stemme lød såpass stødig at ordet 'tror' mistet all troverdighet. Skuffet søkte hun seg til Karishmas blikk.

'Hvorfor det?'

'Jeg reiser bort og blir borte en stund.'

'Javel?'

'Mita, før du begynner å forelese om selvstendighet og sånn, må du høre på meg. Jeg har valgt det selv.'

'Ikke si at du har gitt etter for maset fra foreldrene dine?'

Karishma så ned, tydelig skuffet over at Mita ikke delte entusiasmen hennes. Av alle klisjeers mor, et arrangert panikkekteskap? Det sa seg selv at vennskap tok slutt når sånt skjedde, det gikk over i andre, høfligere former, og så lot man som om alt var som før, mens alt egentlig stinket så innmari av ekteskapelig drittlykke at selv fluene ikke holdt ut å henge rundt dem.

[...]

De ble stille, så på hverandre som om de befant seg på forskjellige broer over samme elv. På Karishmas bro møttes de elskende, på Mitas var det ingen andre enn henne selv (Naveen 2010, 458-9).

["And you're going to accomplish this by secretly filming Adrian? Or throwing money from a bridge?

"It was symbolic."

"Mita, I believe I need to suggest you back off when it comes to your filming."

The friend's voice was so stern that the word 'believe' lost all credibility. Disappointed, she looked into Karishma's eyes.

"Why so?"

“I’m going away and will be gone for a while.”

“So?”

“Mita, before you begin to lecture me on independence and such, you need to hear me out. I have chosen this myself.”

“Don’t tell me that you’ve given into your parents’ pestering?”

Karishma looked down, clearly disappointed that Mita didn’t share in her enthusiasm.

The mother of all clichés: an arranged panic-marriage? It goes without saying that friendships ended when something like this happened, it changes to a more polite form, and one acts as if all was as before, but everything actually stinks terribly of sickly sweet marital bliss that even the flies didn’t want to hang around.

...

They stood still, looking at each other as if they were on different bridges across the same river. On Karishma’s bridge, the lovers met, on Mita’s bridge, there was no one other than herself.]

Presented in this conversation are two views of the arranged marriage plot that do not conform to activating the Nora plot. The conversation echoes Audre Lorde’s famous statement “for the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” but relocates this notion in a contemporary Norwegian perspective (Lorde 1983). They understand that they can’t look to the *godhetsregime* to bring about genuine change in the condition of woman of immigrant background because that would be, in Lorde’s feminist language, a “tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns” (Lorde 1983, 27). Having refused the role of being “ibsenke Noraer” [Ibsenesque Noras] because of its link to racist feminism, Mita and Karishma both choose to stay with their families however they differ in their approach. Karishma embraces the tradition of arranged marriage as she believes in love and values her family’s traditional views of relationships. Karishma, equally as empowered as Mita, chooses for herself. Mita, on the other hand, chooses to advocate for change from within her family’s cultural structure. This suggests that it is possible for women of immigrant background in Norway to reconcile their cultural traditions and feminist identities in diverse ways – not solely by activating the Nora plot.

Disidentification

Desiland concludes with Mita turning away from Gunn (her creative mother) and continuing to have fundamental disagreements, but a resolved relationship, with Bharati (her biological, cultured mother). Mita throws the Nora plot to the wayside realizing that their family isn't perfect but it is all they have, for "Det var dem mot verden" (Naveen 2010, 474). [It was them against the world].⁸⁹ Mita Mehta makes many middles – a fun alliteration, but also a unique and important point. Mita's middles seem to strive, pedantically so as the book's accepted review is that it is "rotet og snakkesaglig" [messy and overly wordy], for a break in the "us vs. them" dichotomy that is found in much of Norway's diasporic literature (Krøger 2010). In this way Naveen is "performing disidentification" or an identity-in-difference, a term borrowed from Third World feminists and radical women of color which "pushes forward the idea of a radical feminist of color identity that shrewdly reconfigures identity for a progressive political agenda" (Muñoz 1999, 6). Basically, disidentification is the process through which an artist or author can break from tropes in order to transcend the narrative trap of fetishization or orientalization.

Muñoz provides a caveat, it is important to note:

"disidentification is not always an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (Muñoz 1999, 5).

It is Mala Naveen and Mita's relative privilege – their near native grasp of the Norwegian language and their physical safety from violence that contrasts other diasporic authors who seek

⁸⁹ This final statement further contrasts the Nora plot as it echoes Amal Aden's thoughts "Det var meg mot verden" (9) [It was me against the world] in her novel *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009).

out legal protection from their parents and may not have a similar grasp of Norwegian language and culture – that allows for the ability to confront their readers and their Norwegian discourse in such a way.

A performance of disidentification creates a counterpublic sphere as the performer, in this case Naveen's use of Mita Mehta, disidentifies with the mass public – by throwing cash over a bridge and refusing to be Ibsen's Nora, Mita disidentifies with the white Norwegian ideal without an anti-assimilationist message. Muñoz describes the strategy of disidentification as a position that “is open to the charge that it is merely an apolitical sidestepping, trying to avoid the trap of assimilating or adhering to different separatist or nationalist ideologies” (Muñoz 1999, 18). It is undeniable that Mita desires Gunn and Gunn's life (the white, Norwegian ideal) but she has come to realize that she desires it with a difference (or Derrida's *différance*), however she may not be mature enough at this point in her life to negotiate between her desire, identity, and morality (Muñoz 1999, 16).⁹⁰ My analysis of *Desiland* shows how the novel breaks from the narrative conventions of Norwegian diaspora literature by not conforming to the three motherhood tropes: the creative mother, the cultured mother, and the appropriation of Ibsen's Nora. I also hope to have shown that through the depictions of these tropes as well as the disruption of the tropes, contemporary Norwegian diaspora texts perform an alternate “Norwegian identity” – one that calls for a radical renegotiation or remapping of the current paradigm of “Norwegianness.” These depictions of motherhood are important as they have a cathartic and social justice purpose but Naveen shows how they are also limited. According to Mita Mehta, enforcing these motherhood tropes do not worry the binary but instead identify, and occasionally ingratiate themselves, with white Norwegianness. Naveen's writing of Mita's

⁹⁰ Muñoz uses “desire, identification, and ideology” as they're “a part of the important work of disidentification” (Muñoz, 16).

performance is a powerful disidentification with the history of minority women stereotyping in the Norwegian public sphere.

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